Cook's Country

SEPTEMBER 2016

Oregon Blackberry Pie

We spent six weeks perfecting this summertime favorite, which features the easiest lattice top ever.

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The Ultimate BLT
Yes, You Need Our Recipe

Slow-Cooker Tomato Sauce
All-Purpose Sauce

Grilled Citrus Chicken
Grill the Fruit, Too

One-Pan Steak Dinner
The Secret Weapon: Coffee

Testing Paper Plates
Avoid Picnic Disasters

Cooking Class: English Muffin Bread

Fettuccine Alfredo
Strong Stirring Is the Key

Hawaiian Fried Chicken
Impossibly Crunchy

Barbecue Coleslaw
Spicy Backyard Favorite

Peach Upside-Down Cake
Easy Skillet Version

Chicken and Rice
Latin Classic at Home

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Senior editor Diane Unger (left) fried dozens of pounds of chicken in pursuit of authentic island flavor. Her secret to a crunchy coating? Potato starch.

WHEN YOU'RE STARING up from your chaise at the palm fronds waving lazily in the tropical breeze, it's hard to imagine you're in the same country as the gray, noisy, traffic-clogged metropolis you may have left behind. But you are. This is Hawaii, our 50th state, and while its natural charms are the stuff of fantasy, it's relatively underappreciated when it comes to food.

Tourists know the luau staples—kalua pork, poi, mai tais—and they have their charms. But the more common (and, frankly, more satisfying) tradition is the omnipresent "plate lunch," often served in a to-go container and including some sort of protein (pork, perhaps, but just as often braised or fried chicken), two scoops of rice, and one scoop of macaroni salad. Sound filling? It is, but then all that outdoor activity—surfing, hiking, poolside lounging—takes energy.

We've covered Hawaiian macaroni salad before (June/July 2009), but this issue marks the first time we've offered a recipe for Hawaiian-style fried chicken, carefully and beautifully developed by our resident fried-chicken expert, senior editor Diane Unger. Learn more about her experience and get her bulletproof recipe on page 11.

TUCKER SHAW
Executive Editor

Foolproof Preserving: A Guide to Small Batch Jams, Jellies, Pickles, Condiments & More

Whether you're bringing in produce from your garden or picking it up at the farmers' market, the bounty of late summer can be overwhelming. Eat as much as you can and preserve the rest! Our indispensable book has tips, ideas, step-by-step instructions, inspiring recipes, and detailed equipment reviews.

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On the cover: Oregon Blackberry Pie Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelty
Illustration: Greg Stevenson

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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
RECIPES THAT WORK™

America's Test Kitchen is a real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of more than 60 test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand exactly how and why they work and eventually arrive at the very best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) and *Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) on public television and listen to us on our weekly radio program on PRX. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram.

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Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

Tea Temperature

I have one friend who swears by bringing the water to a full boil to make a "proper" cup of black tea. But another says that boiling water ruins black tea and the water should be at only a simmer. Is there really a difference?
Natasha Price, Anchorage, Alaska

Different industry experts list the optimal water temperature for brewing black tea as anywhere from 190 to 212 degrees. To see if we could narrow this range a little, we made four batches of black tea (we used Twinings English Breakfast Tea, our favorite plain black tea) using water at 180, 190, 200, and 212 degrees; for each batch, we steeped the tea bags for precisely 4 minutes and then cooled the tea to about 170 degrees before we sampled it plain (no milk or sugar). Our tasters had a distinct preference for the two teas steeped at the higher temperatures, as they found the teas brewed at 180 and 190 degrees to be lacking complexity (because the flavors from the tea weren't fully extracted at lower temperatures). The tasters that preferred the tea brewed with 200-degree water found the tea brewed at 212 degrees to be a little too tannic.
THE BOTTOM LINE: Brew black tea with water that's between 200 and 212 degrees; water in the higher end of this range will produce a stronger, more astringent tea.

Tomato Sizing

When one of your recipes calls for a tomato, what size and type should I use?
Elizabeth Palazzi, Bryn Mawr, Pa.

ONLY ONE OF THESE WILL BOUNCE
A medium tomato is the size of a tennis ball.

The test kitchen uses the guideline that one standard, medium tomato weighs 6 ounces, which translates to ¾ cup of stemmed and chopped tomato. A large tomato weighs 8 ounces. We specify the size and type of tomato only if they are crucial to the recipe's success. Otherwise, we typically default to medium.
THE BOTTOM LINE: When one of our recipes calls for a tomato, generally try to use one that weighs 6 ounces—about the size of a tennis ball. If the recipe is dependent on the type or specific size of the tomato, we'll let you know.

Sheet Shifting

Does it really matter if I switch and rotate my cookie sheets while baking?
Lucy Sammer, Rye, N.Y.

Most of our recipes for cookies, pies, cakes, and tarts call for rotating the baking sheet or pan halfway through baking to ensure even cooking and browning. But we love challenging assumptions, even our own, so to answer your question, we baked our Chewy Sugar Cookies and Thick and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies both with and without rotating the sheets. Sure enough, the cookies on the sheets that weren't rotated baked a bit unevenly, with certain cookies darker due to oven hot spots. The difference was minor but noticeable. Since our recipes are designed with that step, which requires opening the oven door and losing heat, the cookies we did not rotate also baked slightly faster.

This effect is more dramatic in recipes that call for baking two sheets of cookies at once on different oven racks and switching and rotating the sheets halfway through baking. When we repeated the test with recipes that called for switching and rotating the sheets of cookies, the cookies from the unrotated sheet on the bottom rack had significantly darker bases and surfaces than those baked on the top rack.
THE BOTTOM LINE: Swapping the locations of the baking sheets in the oven (top rack to bottom rack and vice versa) and rotating the sheets halfway through baking does indeed make for more evenly cooked baked goods.

NOT SWITCHED
The sheet of cookies baked on the bottom oven rack (left) browned more than the sheet of cookies baked on the top rack (right).

NOT ROTATED
The cookies on the lower right are darker than the rest.

Mustard Seeds

Can I use brown and yellow mustard seeds interchangeably in recipes?
Jennifer Gradischer, Marlton, N.J.

Brown and yellow mustard seeds are produced by different species of the mustard plant, which belongs to the same family as broccoli and kale. Brown mustard seeds are smaller than yellow mustard seeds and, as their name implies, are brown. They're more common in African and Asian cooking and are used to make whole-grain and spicy brown mustards. Yellow mustard seeds, more common in the United States, are slightly larger with golden or straw-colored exteriors and are the key ingredient in prepared yellow mustard.

To see how they differed in flavor, we used the seeds to make our Tarragon–Mustard Seed Rub, which we applied to chicken before cooking it, and our Easy Homemade Mustard. In both cases, tasters commented that the brown mustard seeds were "bitter" and "a bit spicy," while the yellow mustard seeds were more "familiar" and "sweet." Tasters noted that the yellow seeds provided more authentic mustard flavor.
THE BOTTOM LINE: We don't recommend using brown and yellow mustard seeds interchangeably—they have distinctly different flavors.

Pulse versus Process

I notice that when you use a food processor to chop something, you "pulse" a certain number of times rather than running the processor for a few seconds. Why?
Valerie Rando, Tallahassee, Fla.

Pulsing food in a processor bowl offers more control than processing it; the food is chopped more evenly because the ingredients are redistributed—akin to stirring—with every pulse. To test this theory, we made two batches of our Five-Minute Fresh Tomato Salsa, which calls for three 1-second pulses. We made one batch as directed and made another batch in which we let the processor run for 3 seconds. We repeated this test with shelled pecans.

The tomato salsa that had been processed was significantly more pureed and like a tomato sauce, while the pulsed salsa was pleasantly chunky, as a salsa should be. The processed pecans featured an uneven mix of very small and large pieces; the pecans that were pulsed for the same amount of time were chopped much more evenly.
THE BOTTOM LINE: Pulsing produces more evenly chopped food than processing does. For that reason, we'll call for pulsing when we want foods to be evenly chopped.

PROCESSED FOR 3 SECONDS
A bad mix of small and large pieces

THREE 1-SECOND PULSES
A nice even chop

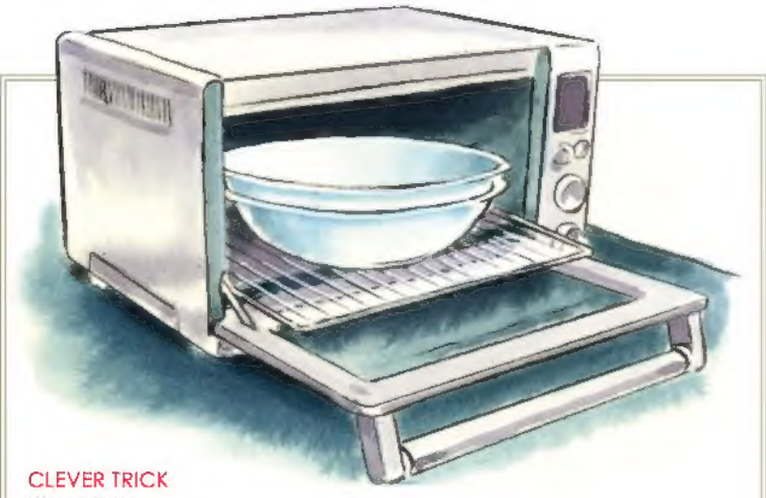
To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to *Ask Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY DIANE UNGER

SMART TIP **Dust Your Knife**
Barbara Blakeson, Annapolis, Md.

My kids love your recipe for Seven-Layer Bars, and I make it at least 10 times a year. I found one trick that makes cutting these sticky treats a bit easier: Once I've removed the uncut bars from the pan using the foil sling, I score the bars to mark where to cut. Then I dust my chef's knife with confectioners' sugar; the sugar adheres to the now-sticky knife. This way the bars don't stick to the knife when I cut them into squares.



CLEVER TRICK
Warm It Up
Agnes Sheehan, Portland, Maine

In my 40 years of cooking, I've learned it's the little things—like warming your bowls for pasta before serving—that really count. On that note, I've found a handy trick for warming bowls (or small plates) for me and my husband before dinner: I heat my toaster oven to 200 degrees and set the bowls inside for about a minute while I'm finishing cooking. This warms the bowls perfectly by the time I'm ready to serve.

HOT IDEA
Diffuse It
Tiffany Moon, Cambridge, Mass.

I have an electric stove with coil burners that heat unevenly; whenever I try to heat milk or cook rice, one side of the saucepan always scorches. Knowing how well and evenly my cast-iron skillet holds heat, I tried putting the skillet on the burner and then my saucepan with milk or rice right in the skillet. This method gives me perfectly even heat and no more scorching.

HANDY TRICK
Marinara Rescue
Dwight Kelton, Sacramento, Calif.

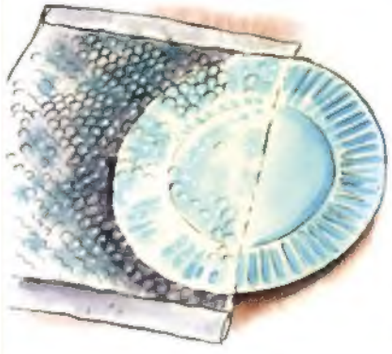
Homemade pizza with store-bought dough is a staple in my house. I used to make my pizza sauce by cooking jarred marinara down until it was thick, but I found that it's easier to dump a jar of marinara into a fine-mesh strainer set over a bowl. By the time I get the dough rolled out, the sauce has drained into a nice thick pizza sauce.

DOUBLE DUTY **Strain It**
Joseph McConkey, Oak Park, Ill.

I love poached eggs, but I hate messy whites, both in the water and on my plate. Thanks to one of your tips, I've learned to crack the eggs into a fine-mesh strainer to let the thin white liquid (the part that gets wispy in the water) drain off. But I found a way to take this tip further: I crack two eggs into a fine-mesh strainer, let the thin liquid drain off, and then place the strainer directly in the poaching water, making sure the eggs stay below the surface. Removing the eggs from the saucepan has never been easier, and they look perfect every time.

HANDY TRICK
Wrench It
Gail Goodman, Glens Falls, N.Y.

I have a heck of a time twisting the small plastic caps off the gallon bottles of water I buy—sometimes they seem cemented on. To solve the problem, I save the fat rubber bands from bunches of broccoli (they're about ½ inch wide) and fit them right over the cap to help me get a better grip. Now I can open the bottles easily, without wrenching the joints in my thumbs.



SMART TIP **Wrap It Up**
Colleen Kelly, Port Townsend, Wash.

I have a lot of china serving plates that are family heirlooms. To protect them from scratches and keep them from sliding around when stacked, I make customized padded envelopes for them. I cut a long piece of bubble wrap, fold it in half, and use duct tape to seal the sides, leaving the top open like an envelope. I slide the plates inside and fold over the top to keep out dust.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

HOMETOWN RECIPE

Smoked Fresh Ham

This smoke-infused pork nestled in a soft bun gives a whole new meaning to ham sandwich.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

A vibrant mustard sauce adds sharp contrast to this new take on pulled pork.

SHOPPING Fresh Ham

A fresh ham isn't like the cured, smoked, or aged ham most of us are used to. Instead, it's just a large pork roast. For this recipe, we call for a **shank-end roast**, meaning that it is cut from the lower rear leg of the hog. We like this cut because it has more skin than a sirloin-end roast.

KEY STEP Crisp the Skin

The crackly skin is arguably the best part of a fresh ham, but it tends to steam and turn rubbery as the meat roasts. To crisp the skin, we pull it off in one piece once the ham is cooked through and roast it solo until it is dark brown. We then chop it and combine it with the chopped ham.

THE USUAL GO-TO cut of pork for backyard barbecue is the pork shoulder, but in certain corners of the Carolinas, many pitmasters swear by ham (see "On the Road"). I don't mean the smoked, sliced ham you'll find on a holiday table but rather "fresh ham" or "green ham," which is bought uncooked and, with care and attention, can be transformed into a remarkably savory, deeply flavored filling for a summertime sandwich.

Fresh ham, cut from the hindquarters of the hog and sold unsmoked and unseasoned, is leaner than traditional barbecue cuts like shoulder. Cooking it takes a little know-how, but if it's done properly, the payoff is big. The meat is less soft, more chunky, and best of all, the crisp, bacon-like bits of skin are chopped and mixed into it.

To begin my tinkering, I ordered a few hams from my butcher since it's rarely available in the supermarket meat case. He gave me a choice between two cuts: the tapered shank end and the rounded sirloin end. Since the sirloin end, with its many bones, can be hard to carve, I opted for the shank end.

Opinions differ on the "best" way to smoke this cut, even among experts. Some coat the ham liberally with rubs. Others use only salt. Even more surprising, some pros call for cooking the pork to just 145 degrees, while others take it way, way higher to 200 degrees.

To get my bearings, I smoked several fresh hams and made one decision: I'd rub the meat with only salt to keep the flavor pure. Leaving the salt on overnight gave me good flavor plus juicy meat.

I found that hams cooked to 145 degrees had chunks of tender, juicy meat but also featured areas of chewy, unrendered collagen and fat. I experimented with various temperatures, but the roast cooked to 200 degrees was the hands-down favorite. The meat was tender and soft, the fat and collagen having melted over the long, slow cooking process.

But the ham took nearly 5 hours on the grill to reach 200 degrees, and maintaining an outdoor fire for that long is a pain. The easier option was to slowly smoke the ham on the grill for 2 hours to infuse it with smoke flavor and then move it indoors to finish in the controlled environment of the oven. Placing it in a 13 by 9-inch baking pan and covering it tightly with foil helped.

Unfortunately, covering the roast caused the skin to steam and become rubbery. I wanted crackle. I tried removing the skin and baking it alongside the ham, but it turned brittle, with a chewy underside. I opted for a hybrid method: Once the pork reached 200 degrees, I took it out of the oven, removed the skin (using a pair of tongs), and returned the skin to the oven to crisp on a baking sheet. This gave me plenty of crackly skin to chop and add to the ham.

A vinegary mustard sauce, a hallmark of South Carolina barbecue, was just the contrast this sandwich needed. When I set out my final platter of smoked fresh ham sandwiches, I fielded protests from coworkers—not about the quality of the ham but about the fact that I'd served my last smoked ham sandwich, for now.

SOUTH CAROLINA SMOKED FRESH HAM

Serves 8 to 10

Plan ahead: The ham must be salted at least 18 hours before cooking. You'll have about 2½ cups of mustard sauce.

HAM

- **1 (6- to 8-pound) bone-in, skin-on shank-end fresh ham**
- **Kosher salt**
- **2 cups wood chips**

MUSTARD SAUCE

- **1½ cups yellow mustard**
- **½ cup cider vinegar**
- **6 tablespoons packed brown sugar**
- **2 tablespoons ketchup**
- **2 teaspoons hot sauce**
- **2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 teaspoon pepper**

Hamburger buns

1. FOR THE HAM: Pat ham dry with paper towels. Place ham on large sheet of plastic wrap and rub all over with 2 tablespoons salt. Wrap tightly in plastic and refrigerate for 18 to 24 hours.

2. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter three-quarters filled

with charcoal briquettes (4½ quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Place wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set cooking grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to medium-high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner as needed to maintain grill temperature of 300 degrees.)

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Unwrap ham and place flat side down on cooler side of grill. Cover grill (position lid vent directly over ham if using charcoal) and cook for 2 hours. Thirty minutes before ham comes off grill, adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees.

5. FOR THE MUSTARD SAUCE: Meanwhile, whisk all ingredients together in bowl. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

6. Transfer ham to 13 by 9-inch baking pan, flat side down. Cover pan tightly with foil. Transfer to oven and roast until fork inserted in ham meets little resistance and meat registers 200 degrees, about 2½ hours.

7. Remove ham from oven and increase oven temperature to 400 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with foil. Using tongs, remove ham skin in 1 large piece. Place skin fatty side down on prepared sheet. Transfer to oven and roast until skin is dark and crispy and sounds hollow when tapped with fork, about 25 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through roasting. Tent ham with foil and let rest while skin roasts.

8. Transfer ham to carving board. Strain accumulated juices from pan through fine-mesh strainer set over bowl; discard solids. Trim and discard excess fat from ham. Remove bone and chop meat into bite-size pieces; transfer to large bowl.

9. When cool enough to handle, chop skin fine. Rewarm reserved ham juices in microwave for 1 minute. Add juices and chopped skin to ham and toss to combine. Season with salt to taste. Serve on buns, topped with mustard sauce.

In South Carolina, a Lesson in Old and New

It's a few minutes before 5 a.m., still dark and bitterly cold, when I pull up to a long cinder-block smokehouse in West Columbia, South Carolina. A faint light from inside illuminates a massive pile of split logs that sits in the yard. As I approach the building, a large cargo door slides open and the silhouettes of a man and his dog appear beneath a struggling fluorescent bulb. His breath hangs in the frigid air as he extends a hand and welcomes me to Hite's Bar-B-Que.

David Hite has been on the graveyard shift since 7 p.m. the previous evening, burning fat logs of oak and hickory down to red-hot coals in a weathered brick fireplace and shoveling them under the 25-foot-long barbecue pit where whole hogs, racks of ribs, fresh hams, and slabs of pork skin cook slowly over the dry heat. We huddle around the fire to keep warm; Hite occasionally wanders off to gather more wood for the flames.

Hite, whose family has run the business since 1957, specializes in whole-hog barbecue. The meat is chopped, not shredded, as you might find in other areas of the state; crispy bits of rendered pork skin, aka cracklin', are incorporated into the meat, creating crunchy little jewels in the otherwise soft pork. It's served with a mustardy sauce, a legacy of the mustard-loving German immigrants who settled this part of central South Carolina in the 1700s. Hite uses a massive whisk attached to an electric drill to mix the 10-gallon batches of sauce. He talks at length about the virtues of "new" and "old" pork skins. "Old" skins are those that came with the hogs he's already cooking, but because customers demand these coveted crispy bits in their pork, Hite buys extra sheets of pork skin (aka "new" skins) from the butcher to render down for extra cracklin'. When ordering their barbecue, many regulars specify, "No new skins!" Hite understands—to his mind, old skins have more flavor.

At 7 a.m. Hite opens the pit, pulls some meat and crispy skin from the nearest hog, and drops it on a tattered cutting board. Over the years his thumb has worn down a patch on the wooden handle of the cleaver he uses to chop it. He makes a couple of sandwiches: one for his daughter's school lunch and one for me. –BRYAN ROOF

David Hite (above) carries on a family tradition at Hite's Bar-B-Que, slowly cooking whole hogs, fresh hams, and pork skins over oak and hickory wood. The slow-cooking meats take 10 or more hours to cook, which means that to be prepped for the lunch rush, Hite must start cooking at 7 p.m. the night before. Loyal customers are particular about their orders and don't mind saying so.

To see more images from our trip to South Carolina, go to **CooksCountry.com/southcarolinabbq.**

Photos: On the Road, Steve Klise

Grilled Citrus Chicken

To add maximum citrus flavor to the mild-mannered chicken breasts, we grilled the fruit, too.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

BONELESS, SKINLESS CHICKEN breasts are often tagged as a boring, easily overcooked substitute for more-flavorful thighs. I disagree. Call me Pollyanna (it wouldn't be the first time), but I think of this lean, mild meat as a blank canvas just waiting for a creative boost.

I love citrus juices—lemon, lime, and orange—but when they're used in a marinade, their acidity can toughen meat. I needed another way to bring these flavors to grilled chicken.

Years of testing have taught us that marinades do most of their work on the surface of the meat, while a solution of salt and water deeply seasons meat and helps keep it moist. By combining the two into a salty marinade, or "brinerade," we season the meat throughout while also adding flavor to the exterior.

I assembled a brinerade of salt, pepper, garlic, sugar (to aid in browning), vegetable oil, and a few tablespoons of water and added equal parts lemon, lime, and orange zest (less acidic than juice) for a balance of sour and sweet. I poured this mixture into a zipper-lock bag, added the chicken breasts, and let them soak for an hour.

Our favorite method for grilling chicken is to build a half-grill fire (piling all the coals on one side of the grill). We cook the chicken on the cooler side, covered with a disposable pan to help trap heat and smoke, until it reaches an internal temperature of 140 degrees. We then transfer it to the hotter side to sear.

KEY STEP **Cover It Up**

We've found that covering a charcoal grill restricts oxygen flow to the coals, which can decrease the heat's intensity. In certain recipes we cover food with an overturned disposable aluminum roasting pan to trap heat around the food while still allowing oxygen to reach the coals.

Right off the grill, my chicken was juicy and well seasoned, with pronounced citrus flavors—but the orange zest overwhelmed, so I tweaked the ratio (2 parts each lemon and lime zest to 1 part orange).

For one last pop of flavor, I halved the fruit I'd zested and grilled the pieces over direct heat. I used the warm, slightly smoky juices to make a quick citrus-mint sauce, bringing the best bits of summer to this simple dish.

GRILLED CITRUS CHICKEN Serves 4

Plan ahead: The chicken needs to marinate for at least an hour. Do not marinate it longer than 12 hours or it will be too salty. Use a rasp-style grater to zest the citrus. The chicken takes longer to cook on a gas grill, so begin checking it at the end of the range in step 3.

- 1 orange
- 1 lemon
- 1 lime
- 7 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons water
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2½ teaspoons sugar
- Salt and pepper
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- 1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum roasting pan (if using charcoal)
- 1 teaspoon mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh mint

We grill orange, lemon, and lime halves to create a bracing, bright, lightly smoky citrus sauce.

1. Grate 1 teaspoon zest from orange, 2 teaspoons zest from lemon, and 2 teaspoons zest from lime. Place all citrus zest in bowl. Halve orange, lemon, and lime and set aside. Add 3 tablespoons oil, water, two-thirds of garlic, 2 teaspoons sugar, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper to citrus zest and whisk to combine. Transfer brinerade to 1-gallon zipper-lock bag. Add chicken, press out air, seal bag, and turn to distribute brinerade. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 12 hours.

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner(s).

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chicken skinned side down on cooler side of grill, with thicker ends facing coals. (Edges of chicken should be no more than 4 inches from center of primary burner if using gas.) Cover with disposable pan (if using gas, close lid) and cook until bottom of chicken just begins to develop light grill marks and is no longer pink, 6 to 9 minutes.

4. Flip chicken and rotate so that thinner ends face coals. Cover as before and continue to cook until chicken registers 140 degrees, 6 to 9 minutes longer.

5. Remove disposable pan and transfer chicken and citrus halves, cut side down, to hotter side of grill. Cook chicken, uncovered (covered if using gas), until dark grill marks appear, 2 to 4 minutes. Flip chicken and cook, uncovered (covered if using gas), until marked on second side and chicken registers 160 degrees, 2 to 4 minutes longer. Cook citrus halves until lightly charred, about 4 minutes.

6. Transfer chicken to cutting board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Squeeze 3 tablespoons orange juice, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and 1 tablespoon lime juice into bowl. Whisk in mayonnaise, Dijon, remaining one-third of garlic, remaining ½ teaspoon sugar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in remaining ¼ cup oil until emulsified. Stir in mint and season with salt and pepper to taste. Slice each breast on bias ¼ inch thick. Serve, drizzled with citrus sauce.

Spicy Barbecue Coleslaw

Slaw is too often relegated to wallflower status. We wanted one that announced itself. BY KATIE LEAIRD

MANY VERSIONS OF coleslaw are nothing more than waterlogged cabbage shreds awash in diluted dressing—no wonder it goes uneaten. I wanted coleslaw with personality that could hold its own amid a full barbecue spread.

Cabbage is 93 percent water, which will thin the dressing, obliterate flavor, and compromise creaminess. I had to get rid of that water.

One popular method is to salt the sliced cabbage, let it drain, and then rinse and dry it before adding it to the slaw. Frustrated with the four-step process, I tried just salting and draining the cabbage, but the results were too briny. I swapped in sugar for some of the salt (sugar also draws out water), but it took 2 hours to fully drain the cabbage. I'm not that patient.

I tried gently heating the salted and sugared cabbage in the microwave for 3 minutes. This released the water from the cabbage and also tenderized the cabbage a bit, taking it from squeaky to semitender, with just enough crunch. A quick squeeze in a dish towel banished the excess water.

I wanted a spicy dressing to cut through those traditional sweet and smoky barbecue flavors. I knew I'd lean on mayonnaise for creaminess, but I wanted this dressing to pack a multilayered kick, with heat up front, in the middle, and at the finish.

My three-pronged assault started with horseradish. Instead of grating fresh horseradish (a pain), I opted for prepared (not to be confused with its milder sibling, creamed horseradish). Horseradish's signature heat spreads up through the nose with a fiery tingle but then quickly dissipates. My second heat source would be mustard. I auditioned both yellow and Dijon but ultimately settled on dry mustard powder. Though mild on its own, the powder comes alive once activated by the liquid in the dressing, producing a fresher, more potent punch than the jarred stuff. The third heat source is a test kitchen favorite, ground cayenne pepper, which offered a clean, straightforward kick. Instead of traveling into the nasal passages, the capsaicin in cayenne creates lingering heat throughout the mouth and throat. Just ¼ teaspoon turned up the volume one final notch.

With spicy heat hitting multiple targets, from the nose (horseradish and mustard) down to the throat (cayenne), this slaw was far from ho-hum.

SPICY BARBECUE COLESLAW

Serves 8 to 10

To save time, we shred the cabbage in a food processor fitted with a slicing disk. If you don't have a food processor, slice the cabbage wedges crosswise ⅛ inch thick. Shred the carrots on the large holes of a box grater. For an extra spicy kick, up the horseradish to 2 tablespoons. The flavors will intensify as the coleslaw chills.

- **1 head green cabbage (2½ pounds), quartered, cored, and shredded (12 cups)**
- **2 tablespoons sugar**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 cup mayonnaise**
- **⅓ cup distilled white vinegar**
- **1 tablespoon prepared horseradish**
- **1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 garlic clove, minced**
- **½ teaspoon dry mustard**
- **¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- **2 carrots, peeled and shredded**

1. Toss cabbage, sugar, and ½ teaspoon salt together in bowl. Microwave, covered, until just beginning to wilt, about 3 minutes. Let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Transfer half of cabbage to center of clean dish towel. Gather ends of towel to form bundle and twist to squeeze out excess water. Transfer to clean bowl and repeat with remaining cabbage.

2. Whisk mayonnaise, vinegar, horseradish, Worcestershire, garlic, mustard, cayenne, 1¼ teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper in large bowl until smooth. Stir in cabbage and carrots and refrigerate, covered, until chilled, at least 1 hour. Serve. (Coleslaw can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

A toss of fresh mozzarella cheese adds a bit of substance to this light, summery side dish.

Watermelon-Tomato Salad

They're neighbors in the garden—could they be friends on the plate?

BY KATIE LEAIRD

WATERMELONS AND TOMATOES are both vibrant in color, exploding with juiciness, and crazily flavorful in the height of summer. When we've experimented with watermelon-tomato salads in the past, we've highlighted the tomato, using the watermelon as a backup element. This time, I wanted the sweet watermelon out front, with tomatoes in the supporting role.

One bugaboo of mixing these two ingredients is the look of it: bright-red components are barely distinguishable from each other. What's more, both release an outsize amount of moisture. Yellow cherry tomatoes solved the color conundrum. As a bonus, the cherry tomatoes released far less liquid than larger varieties did.

But watermelon is so named for a reason: It's full of liquid. And with 4 cups of cut-up watermelon, I had a lot of excess liquid. Patting the watermelon dry with paper towels was insufficient. Weighing down planks of watermelon to press out liquid made a mealy mess.

As it turned out, the best way was the simplest: cutting it into cubes and draining it in a colander. Sprinkling the cubes with salt helped pull out even more moisture but turned the watermelon brackish; a bit of sugar worked just as well, with better flavor results.

To gently balance the melon's sweetness, I added the delicate flavor of a sliced shallot. Fresh basil lent brightness, bits of fresh mozzarella added substance, and a simple vinaigrette brought everything together.

WATERMELON-TOMATO SALAD

Serves 4

This salad benefits from a liberal sprinkling of salt and pepper, so don't be shy when seasoning the mozzarella.

- **4 cups seedless watermelon, cut into 1-inch cubes**
- **2 teaspoons sugar**
- **12 ounces yellow cherry tomatoes, halved**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling**
- **1 tablespoon cider vinegar**
- **½ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice**
- **1 shallot, sliced into thin rings**
- **¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn**
- **6 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, torn into 1-inch pieces**

1. Gently combine watermelon and sugar in large bowl. Transfer watermelon to colander and set colander in now-empty bowl. Cover colander with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

2. Toss tomatoes, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in small bowl; set aside.

3. Whisk oil, vinegar, lemon zest and juice, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add shallot, basil, drained watermelon, and tomatoes and toss gently to combine. Transfer to platter and evenly scatter mozzarella over top. Drizzle with extra oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Grilled Boneless Short Ribs

We decided to bring this low-and-slow favorite into the fast lane.

BY MATTHEW CARD

LAYERED WITH FAT and ribboned with bands of chewy cartilage, boneless English-style short ribs are not a common choice for grilling in America. We typically use low-and-slow cooking methods, like braising, to unlock this cut's rich flavor.

But in Argentina, where beef is king and grilling is an art form, boneless hunks of short rib are cooked over hardwood coals to a rosy medium-rare. Sliced thin and served with a tangy herb sauce or piquant pepper relish, the ribs often take top billing at the *churrascaria*. I wanted to help us get into the act up here in North America.

I prepared a handful of existing recipes to help set my course and was knocked sideways by the results. The best of the bunch produced juicy ribs with a deep, meaty savor rivaling that of the best—and most expensive—steaks I have tasted. Unfortunately, producing ribs that were an even medium-rare—and weren't scorched by flare-ups—required frequent flipping and steady supervision. There had to be an easier way.

Technically speaking, "short rib" is a vague name applied to ribs taken from three locations along the cow's rib cage, each exhibiting slightly different thickness and attributes. The thickest, leanest, beefiest of the bunch are referred to as "chuck" short ribs, and after grilling all three styles, these chuck ribs won handily. Consult your butcher if necessary; otherwise, look for the thickest ribs available and trim away the exterior membrane and fat before cooking.

I thought it best to treat the ribs like a thick steak, for which there are two prevailing—and opposing—cooking methods: sear quickly on the hotter side of the grill to develop a crust and then finish on the cooler side, or flip the script and cook them through slowly on the cooler side before finishing on the hotter side to develop a crust. In this case, the first method yielded beautifully browned ribs that, once sliced, revealed a band of well-done meat encircling rare meat—and way too much thick, unrendered fat. The latter method came closer but still featured too much fat.

I needed to cook the ribs as slowly as I could, rendering as much fat as possible, before browning them quickly over a very hot fire. To that end, I piled all the coals on one side of the grill and cooked the ribs on the opposite side with the grill covered (essentially, grill roasting) before sliding them over the hot coals to finish. The method produced passable results, but covering the grill quashed much of the coals' heat, making it nearly impossible to create a crust without overcooking the meat.

I turned to a favorite test kitchen trick, capping the ribs with a disposable aluminum roasting pan and waiting patiently for any sign that the meat was cooking. Apparently, there simply wasn't enough heat for this method to work. But after tinkering, it did work when I spread a single thin layer of coals beneath the ribs (piling the majority of coals on the opposite side); the ribs cooked through and rendered their fat, ready for the hot sear.

These ribs were the best to date—evenly cooked, richly browned, and free of gnarly fat chunks—though I wanted a smokier flavor in the meat. This proved easy to do: I slid a foil packet filled with soaked wood chips beneath the ribs during the first step. The disposable pan captured the upwelling smoke, bathing the meat in its flavors. (As an added benefit, the foil packet shielded the coals from the dripping fat, reducing flare-ups).

We grill the ribs on the cooler side of the grill before moving them to the hotter side to develop rosy interiors and satisfying char.

The ribs tasted terrific on their own, though I still wanted a quick and easy accompaniment to cut the richness. An Argentine-style *criolla* sauce of minced raw onion, sweet bell pepper, garlic, olive oil, and vinegar tasted good, albeit a bit raw. I much preferred the blend once I sautéed the ingredients and rounded it out with pungent cumin, fresh cilantro, and spicy cayenne pepper and substituted lemon juice for the vinegar. Welcome to America, grilled short ribs. There's plenty of room at the table

GRILLED BONELESS SHORT RIBS WITH ARGENTINE-STYLE PEPPER SAUCE

Serves 4 to 6

The thickness and marbling of boneless short ribs can vary a good deal. Look for lean ribs cut from the chuck. If in doubt, ask your butcher for the cut by its technical designation: NAMP 130A. If you need to buy bone-in English-style ribs, slice off the ribs, cartilage, and excess fat. If your short ribs are a single slab, cut them into 2- to 3-inch-wide strips. Plan ahead. The salted short ribs need to sit for at least an hour before grilling.

- **2½–3 pounds boneless beef short ribs, 1½ to 2 inches thick, 2 inches wide, and 4 to 5 inches long, trimmed**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **1½ cups wood chips**
- **½ cup finely chopped red bell pepper**
- **⅓ cup finely chopped red onion**
- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 teaspoon paprika**
- **½ teaspoon ground cumin**
- **¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- **⅓ cup minced fresh cilantro**
- **2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- **1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum roasting pan (if using charcoal)**

1. Pat beef dry with paper towels and sprinkle all over with 1 tablespoon salt. Let sit at room temperature for at least 1 hour before grilling. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain.

2. Meanwhile, combine bell pepper, onion, oil, garlic, paprika, cumin, cayenne, and ½ teaspoon salt in small saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat until vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in cilantro and lemon juice. Transfer to bowl and set aside.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 12 by 10-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 3 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet. Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour two-thirds evenly over half of grill, then pour remaining coals over other half of grill. Place wood chip packet on smaller pile of coals, set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet. Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to medium and secondary burner(s) to medium-high.

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Season beef with pepper. Place beef on grill directly over foil packet. Cover beef with disposable pan if using charcoal (if using gas, close lid) and cook for 5 minutes. Flip beef and cook 5 minutes longer, covering in same manner.

5. Slide beef to hotter side of grill and cook, covered if using gas, until well browned on all sides and beef registers 125 degrees, 4 to 8 minutes, turning often. Transfer beef to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Slice beef against grain as thin as possible. Serve with pepper sauce.

TEST KITCHEN TIP **Going Against the Grain**

Cutting meat perpendicular to the grain is essential for creating a tender texture, but the direction of the grain isn't always easy to identify. If the direction of the grain isn't clear, make a test slice. If you see that you've cut parallel to the grain, turn the meat 90 degrees before cutting again.

WRONG WAY
The fibers run parallel to the cut, making each bite stringy

RIGHT WAY
The fibers run perpendicular to the cut, making each bite tender

Grilled Button Mushrooms

Portobellos are great on the grill. But what about the little guys? BY MATTHEW CARD

FEW FOODS BENEFIT as much from the high, dry heat of live-fire cooking as mushrooms do. Fire concentrates their sweet, earthy flavor and magnifies their meaty texture. Fans of grilled portobello caps know this already, but what about the smaller, milder white button mushroom?

I tried several recipes for grilled button mushrooms that clearly demonstrated what didn't work. The real duds employed a low fire, corralled the mushrooms in a foil "hobo pack" or disposable pan, or skewered the caps into a stack. In each case, the mushrooms stewed in their own juices and netted no char. It was clear that keeping the heat high was key to drawing out the mushrooms' excess liquid, which allowed them to brown.

I set to figuring out how best to prep the mushrooms. I tried three tacks: leaving the stems intact, completely removing the stems by pulling them out, and trimming the stems flush with the bottoms of the caps. Unsurprisingly, the mushrooms with stems intact browned unevenly. Those with the stem pulled out cooked up tough. But those with the stems trimmed flush? Just right.

A light coating of extra-virgin olive oil and some salt and pepper before grilling added flavor and encouraged even browning. Once the mushrooms had browned, I tossed them with melted butter, soy sauce, garlic, fresh thyme, lemon juice, and parsley in a disposable pan. I set the pan back on the grill and stirred for a few minutes as the mushrooms absorbed the flavors. Result? An easy, surprising side.

A toss in garlicky butter adds deep flavor.

GRILLED BUTTON MUSHROOMS

Serves 4 to 6

For even cooking, choose mushrooms of a uniform size. Medium mushrooms (1 to 2 inches in diameter) are best here. Large mushrooms take much longer to cook. Season and oil the mushrooms just before grilling, or they will develop a wrinkled appearance and slimy texture.

- **2 pounds white mushrooms, stems trimmed flush with caps**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**
- **1½ tablespoons soy sauce**
- **1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- **2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme**
- **1 garlic clove, minced to paste**
- **1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum roasting pan**

1. In large bowl, toss mushrooms with oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Combine butter, parsley, soy sauce, lemon juice, thyme, and garlic in disposable pan.

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium-high.

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place mushrooms gill side up on grill and cook (covered if using gas) until mushrooms have released some liquid and are char-streaked, about 6 minutes. Flip and cook (covered if using gas) until second side is well browned and char-streaked, 4 to 6 minutes longer.

4. Transfer mushrooms to disposable pan and place pan on grill. Cook (covered if using gas), stirring frequently, until butter has melted and mushrooms have absorbed liquid and appear glazed, about 3 minutes. Serve.

Hawaiian Fried Chicken

Just how much flavor can you pack into fried chicken? In Hawaii, the answer is "more."

BY DIANE LNGER

IN HAWAII, FRIED chicken is often served as part of a "plate lunch" with macaroni salad and steamed rice (see "The American Table"). But not all fried chicken in Hawaii is the same. *Mochiko* chicken features boneless, skinless thighs marinated in soy sauce and battered with sweet rice flour. *Katsu*-style chicken is coated in crisp panko crumbs and fried. *Karaage* chicken is marinated in soy sauce or tamari, brown sugar, sake, and lots of ginger and garlic; coated in potato starch; and then fried and served with a sharp dipping sauce. The common denomina tor is utter deliciousness.

I made versions of each style and gathered tasters. Each style had its fans, but the flavorful karaage was the most popular; we used it as a primary inspira tion. I found a few more recipes to test out the nuances. Some recipes called for marinating the chicken overnight, making for supersalty chicken. Others had so much potato starch that the ele ments were out of proportion. I wanted the chicken to be seasoned throughout but not too salty. And I wanted the coating to be thin and crispy, with a dipping sauce that united the flavors and balanced the chicken's richness.

For our recipe for Hawaiian Macaroni Salad, go to **CooksCountry.com/hawaiiansalad**.

My first decision was to use boneless, skinless chicken thighs, for both ease and maximum flavor. For the marinade, soy sauce (you can substitute tamari if you'd like your chicken gluten free), brown sugar, and a heavy dose of ginger and garlic were a given, but how to get the biggest bang for the buck was a balancing act. My first tests were too salty, so I decided to dilute the concentration of the soy sauce with another liquid. The easiest and best tasting option was water, at a ratio of 1 cup water to ½ cup soy sauce

I used the food processor to make a garlic and ginger paste, doing so let me skip the tedious step of peeling the ginger, as the final result was so finely ground that it didn't matter. Sweetened with 3 tablespoons of brown sugar, the paste adhered nicely to the chicken.

The traditional coating for this chicken is straight up potato starch, but no matter how many times and tech niques I tried (and there were plenty, believe me), I couldn't get an evenly fried, crispy exterior that didn't turn an unsightly blotchy white. I tried combi nations of potato starch mixed with rice flour, cornstarch, all purpose flour, and even tapioca starch, but all left me with blotchy, too-thick, unevenly cooked coatings. I nearly threw in the towel.

But I'm no quitter when it comes to fried chicken, so for my next test I removed the chicken from the marinade, let the excess drip off, and transferred each piece to a mixture of potato starch and baking powder that I'd seasoned with salt, pepper, and sesame seeds. I coated each piece lightly and transferred it to a parchment lined baking sheet. Once the pieces were coated, I firmly pressed the coating into the meat and then refrigerated it, tightly covered, for at least 30 minutes. This process allowed the potato starch to become fully saturated with absorbed marinade, allowing it to cook evenly when fried at a temperature of 375 degrees Finally—perfect, lightly golden chicken pieces.

For a dipping sauce, I combined ½ cup of seasoned rice vinegar and ¼ cup each of fresh lemon juice and soy sauce. I fried up a final batch of chicken, gathered my tasters, and stood back to watch them greedily devour the crispy, crunchy, sweet, sour, salty chicken and then come back for more.

Our supercrunchy chicken gets its brittle coating from potato starch; a tangy dipping sauce adds even more flavor

HAWAIIAN-STYLE FRIED CHICKEN

Serves 4 to 6

You will need at least a 6-quart Dutch oven for this recipe. Plan ahead: The chicken marinates for at least an hour before breading. Pressing the chicken after dredging it in the starch ensures a more uniform coating.

CHICKEN

- **1 (3-ounce) piece ginger, unpeeled, cut into ½-inch pieces**
- **4 garlic cloves, peeled**
- **1 cup water**
- **½ cup soy sauce**
- **3 tablespoons packed light brown sugar**
- **1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil**
- **2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and halved crosswise**
- **2¼ cups potato starch**
- **2 tablespoons sesame seeds**
- **1½ teaspoons baking powder**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **3 quarts peanut or vegetable oil**

DIPPING SAUCE

- **½ cup seasoned rice vinegar**
- **¼ cup soy sauce**
- **¼ cup lemon juice (2 lemons)**
- **Pepper**

1. FOR THE CHICKEN: Process ginger and garlic in food processer until finely chopped, about 15 seconds; transfer to large bowl. Add water, soy sauce, sugar, and sesame oil and whisk to combine. Add chicken and press to submerge. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 3 hours.

2. FOR THE DIPPING SAUCE: Whisk vinegar, soy sauce, and lemon juice together in bowl. Season with pepper to taste.

3. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet. Whisk potato starch, sesame seeds, baking powder, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in large bowl.

4. Working with 1 piece of chicken at a time, remove from marinade, allowing excess to drip back into bowl. Dredge chicken in potato starch mixture, pressing to adhere. Gently shake off excess and transfer chicken to parchment lined sheet. Coating will look mottled; using your hand, press on chicken to smooth out coating. Cover sheet tightly with plastic and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour.

5. Add peanut oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 2 inches deep; heat oil over medium high heat to 375 degrees. Carefully add one-third of chicken to pot and fry until deep golden brown and cooked through, about 5 minutes, stirring gently as needed to prevent pieces from sticking together. Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 350 and 375 degrees.

6. Transfer chicken to prepared rack. Return oil to 375 degrees and repeat in 2 more batches with remaining chicken. Serve chicken with sauce.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT
Potato Starch

Potato starch is made by peeling potatoes, drying them, grinding them, and then putting them through a wash to remove the starch, which is then dried. We call for potato starch to coat our Hawaiian-Style Fried Chicken because it produced the crunchiest results, besting cornstarch, flour, and a combination of the two in side-by-side tests. That's because potato starch fries up into a crispy, porous coating faster than either cornstarch or wheat starch (flour). This means potato starch can develop into a crunchy coating in the time required to fry the chicken, whereas a cornstarch or flour coating would need to fry longer, resulting in overcooked chicken.

The American Table
Hawaiian Chicken, Japanese Style

Beginning in the mid-1880s, Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaii by the thousands to work the sugar and pineapple plantations. Influenced by the settlers, the local Hawaiian cuisine evolved to include several recipes for fried chicken: *mochiko*, *katsu*, and *karaage*, all Japanese adaptations of Chinese or European techniques. Our Hawaiian-Style Fried Chicken recipe takes cues from the karaage style, which is a type of "dry" frying (without batter), though it has become shorthand for the recipe. (Our recipe gets its crunch from a dry coating of potato starch.)

Another Hawaiian tradition that takes inspiration from Japan is the ubiquitous "plate lunch," a complete meal usually served in a compartmentalized container, which has an ancestor in the traditional bento box.

–REBECCA HAYS

LUNCH IN A BOX
Hawaii's plate lunch (top) is like Japan's bento box but typically includes fried chicken, macaroni salad, and white rice.

Are All Disposable Plates Created Equal?

A loaded picnic plate suddenly collapses, showering your sandals with potato salad. Been there?

Our longtime favorite disposable plates by Vanity Fair were recently redesigned, so we decided to revisit the category. We stocked up on eight nationally available products priced from $0.11 to $0.54 per plate. Although most come in multiple sizes, we opted for plates around 10 inches wide—roughly the size of a dinner plate.

We put these plates to the test by saddling them with a full 2 pounds of bone-in chicken breast, piping-hot baked beans, coleslaw and potato salad. Then we walked around the bustling test kitchen, periodically prodding the food with a fork, to simulate plate usage at a barbecue or party. Half the plates buckled, sagged, or cracked from the get-go. But things really took a nosedive when we repeated the test after letting food sit on the plates for 5 minutes: Some plates practically bent in half as we held them, sending baked beans and coleslaw onto the floor. Only a handful of plates—the thickest ones in our lineup—held strong.

But two of the thickest plates, both made from polystyrene (a plastic that can be either hard or flexible), tore and melted when we cut chicken or reheated pizza in a microwave on them. Plates made from thick paper or bagasse (paper made from sugarcane pulp) were better: strong, durable, and microwave-safe. We also preferred plates with close to 8 inches of eating surface (the width of the plate sans rim) and tall, steep sides that helped contain potential spills.

We have a new favorite disposable plate: fully microwavable Hefty Super Strong Paper Plates ($2.99 for 16 plates) were thick, sturdy, and roomy. –LAUREN SAVOIE

To see the complete testing and chart, go to **CooksCountry.com/aug16**.

KEY: **Good** ★★★ **Fair** ★★ **Poor** ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

HEFTY Super Strong Paper Plates
Price: $2.99 for 16 plates ($0.19 per plate)
Material: 100% bagasse (dried sugarcane pulp)

TESTERS' NOTES

These plates were the roomiest of the bunch, with an 8-inch eating surface and a steep lip to keep food from spilling over. Thanks to their thick bottoms, they were impervious to pizza grease had no trouble holding up 2 pounds of food, and didn't budge when prodded with a fork or knife (though testers noticed a tiny bit of floppiness after food sat for 5 minutes, food was still safely contained).

Sturdiness ★★½
Containment ★★★

RECOMMENDED

CHINET Classic White Dinner Plates
Price: $6.49 for 32 plates ($0.20 per plate)
Material: 100% preconsumer recycled paper

From afar, these plates look identical to our winning plates and performed nearly as admirably, containing 2 pounds of picnic fare with ease during a loop around the kitchen. Though testers noticed some slouching (slightly more than with our winner) after we let food sit for 5 minutes, these plates were relatively roomy, contained all the food, and kept pizza grease at bay.

Sturdiness ★★
Containment ★★★

DIXIE Ultra Paper Plates
Price: $2.99 for 22 plates ($0.14 per plate)
Materials: Paperboard, printing ink, and a water-based polymer barrier coating

Though slightly thinner than other top products, these plates held piles of food sturdily, with only minor buckling in spots where we pressed with a fork. There were no grease stains when we loaded them with pizza and nary a mark when we cut chicken with steak knives. Some testers thought that the eating surface was a little too cramped when loaded with food.

Sturdiness ★★½
Containment ★★½

Photos: Top Right: The Tasty-stand Honolulu Food Blog. Lower Right: Shutterstock. Bottom: Steve Klise

Grilled Artichokes

Cooking these vegetables perfectly on the grill took a bit of heart.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

THE CENTER OF the artichoke universe is Monterey County, California, which produces millions of pounds of the vegetable each year. Locals love artichokes' delicate flavor, especially when grilled. Cooking them over an open fire brings out a nutty note

Artichokes are part of the thistle family and are technically the bud of a flower; the spiky tips of the leaves evolved to protect the bud from predators—except for those with a sharp knife. After experimenting, I found it best to use a vegetable peeler to remove the fibrous outer skin of the stem before snapping off the bottom rows of the remaining tough leaves. Placing each artichoke on its side and lopping off the top quarter got rid of most of the spikes I pruned the rest of the leaves with scissors (see "Preparing Artichokes").

Early tests proved that precooking the artichokes was essential; if done entirely on the grill, they'd burn before cooking through. Boiling them in a seasoned broth of water, lemon juice, and red pepper flakes softened them just enough. It was easy to cut them in half and scoop out the fuzzy, inedible chokes with a spoon.

Because my artichokes were mostly cooked through, all I needed from the fire was a solid char, which I achieved with just 2 to 4 minutes per side over hot coals.

I wanted a straightforward sauce to highlight the artichokes' flavor. A blend of lemon, garlic, and butter was the answer. It came together in minutes and was perfect for drizzling and dipping

GRILLED ARTICHOKES WITH LEMON BUTTER

Serves 4 to 6

Look for artichokes that are bright green, with tightly packed leaves; avoid soft artichokes or those with brown splotches The leaves should not appear feathery or dried out. To eat, use your teeth to scrape the flesh from the inner part of the exterior eaves. The tender inner eaves heart, and stem are entirely edible

- **4 artichokes (8 to 10 ounces each)**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **½ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- **2 lemons**
- **6 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **1 garlic clove, minced to paste**
- **2 tablespoons olive oil**

1. Cut off and discard bottom ¼ inch of each artichoke stem. Remove any leaves attached to stems. Using vegetable peeler, peel away outer layer of stems. Pull bottom row of tough outer leaves downward toward stems and break off at base. Cut off and discard top quarter of each artichoke Using scissors, cut off sharp tips of remaining leaves all around artichokes.

2. Combine 3 quarts water, 3 tablespoons salt, and pepper flakes in Dutch oven. Cut 1 lemon in half, squeeze juice into pot, then add spent halves. Bring to boil over high heat. Add artichokes, cover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until tip of paring knife inserted into base of artichoke slips easily in and out, 25 to 28 minutes, stirring occasionally

To ensure their doneness, we parcook the artichokes before throwing them onto the grill.

3. Meanwhile, grate 2 teaspoons zest from remaining lemon; combine with butter, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Microwave at 50 percent power until butter is melted and bubbling and garlic is fragrant, about 2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Squeeze 1½ tablespoons juice from zested lemon and stir into butter mixture. Season with salt and pepper to taste

4. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Place artichokes stem side up on prepared rack and let drain for 10 minutes. Cut artichokes in half lengthwise. Using spoon, scoop out fuzzy choke, leaving small cavity in center of each half.

5A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

5B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

6. Clean and oil cooking grate. Brush artichokes with oil. Place artichokes on grill and cook (covered if using gas) until lightly charred, 2 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer artichokes to platter and tent with aluminum foil. Briefly rewarm lemon butter in microwave, if necessary, and serve with artichokes

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Preparing Artichokes**

Trimming before cooking means there's nothing to do at the table but enjoy

1. Cut off bottom ¼ inch of stem. Remove any eaves attached to stem Using vegetable peeler, peel stem

2. Pull bottom row of tough outer eaves downward toward stem and break off at base

3. Cut off and discard top quarter. Use scissors to cut off sharp tips of remaining eaves.

Illustration Lauren Pettapiece

Smoky Stuffed Potatoes

Traditional twice-baked potatoes are good enough. But as usual, we wanted something better than that. BY DIANE UNGER

PICTURE A CLASS C steakhouse favorite, the twice-baked potato: a crisp potato shell filled with fluffy, cheesy mashed potatoes and baked until the top turns golden brown. Now take it to the grill and add smoke. Not a bad idea, if you ask me.

My hopes for creating this dish entirely on the grill were dashed early on; baking potatoes on the grill took forever and gave me subpar, inconsistent results. So I decided to start in the kitchen, fully baking six russets in the oven. I sliced them in half lengthwise, let them cool slightly, and carefully scooped the flesh from all 12 halves into a bowl, leaving about ¼ inch of potato around the interior of each half. I roughly mashed the scooped-out flesh with butter, salt, pepper, half-and-half, and plenty of mild, melty Colby Jack.

I chose eight of the best-looking shells, brushed them with melted butter inside and out, and seasoned them with salt and pepper. (I discarded the remaining four shells.) After dividing the mashed potato mixture equally among the shells, mounding it generously, I scruffed up the tops (the better to hold the extra cheese I'd add later). Then I covered them with plastic and slid them into the fridge to await their visit to the grill. (Bonus discovery: The prepared potatoes can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours, if you're a make-ahead kind of cook.)

Before grilling, I prepared a wood chip packet by soaking ½ cup of wood chips in water for 15 minutes and then draining them and folding them into a foil packet with 2 small slits in the top.

In the meantime, I started my coals in a chimney starter; once they were ready, I mounded them into a pile on one side of the grill, leaving the other side cool. I set my packet of soaked wood chips directly on the coals, and once they were smoking (about 5 minutes later), I placed the potatoes on the cooler side of the grill, covered it, and crossed my fingers. (See step 5B for gas grill instructions.)

After about 20 minutes over indirect heat, the exteriors of the potatoes were a deep golden color. I sprinkled a little more grated cheese on top of each and then covered the grill until the cheese melted and browned slightly. A handful of minced chives was the crowning touch, adding a fresh counterpoint to the deep smoke flavor.

My smoky baked potatoes took some time and attention to achieve, but they were adorable. And the smiles on my tasters' faces left no doubt: The extra effort was worth it.

SMOKY BAKED STUFFED POTATOES

Serves 4 to 6

Try to find potatoes of equal size and weight to ensure even cooking. Plan ahead: The potatoes need to bake for about 1 hour and 10 minutes before being prepared for the grill.

- **6 (10- to 12-ounce) russet potatoes**
- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 4 tablespoons softened**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **12 ounces Colby Jack cheese, shredded (3 cups)**
- **½ cup half-and-half**
- **¼ cup minced fresh chives**
- **½ cup wood chips**
- **Sour cream**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Place potatoes on wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet and bake until centers register 205 degrees and potatoes are very soft, about 1 hour 10 minutes.

2. Immediately slice potatoes in half lengthwise; let cool for 5 minutes. Scoop flesh of all potatoes into bowl, leaving ¼ inch layer of potato in each shell. Choose 8 best-looking shells (discard remaining 4 shells); brush interior and exterior of each shell with melted butter and season with salt and pepper. Transfer shells cut side up to rimmed baking sheet.

3. Using potato masher, mash potatoes until smooth. Stir in 1½ cups Colby Jack, half-and-half, 2 tablespoons chives, 1 teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and softened butter until combined. Divide filling among potato shells (about ½ cup each), mounding in center. Scruff up top of filling with tines of fork. (Potatoes can be covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 24 hours.)

4. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8-by-4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet.

A smoky fire transforms these twice-baked potatoes from good to great

5A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour into steeply banked pile against side of grill. Set wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

5B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to medium-high and turn off other burners. (Adjust primary burner as needed to maintain grill temperature between 325 and 350 degrees.)

6. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place potatoes on cooler side of grill. Cover (position lid vent over potatoes if using charcoal) and cook until filling registers 160 degrees and tops of potatoes begin to brown, about 20 minutes. Sprinkle potatoes with remaining 1½ cups Colby Jack, cover, and continue to cook until cheese is melted and lightly browned, 10 to 15 minutes longer. Transfer potatoes to platter and sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons chives. Serve with sour cream.

Arroz con Pollo

Though chicken and rice is a classic combination, creating a single Latin American version was far from simple. BY MORGAN BOLING

MANY CUISINES AROUND the world have a version of chicken and rice, from Spanish paella to Singaporean chicken rice. But among the most famous, and popular, is Latin American–style arroz con pollo ("rice with chicken"), with fall-off-the-bone chicken nestled in creamy, flavorful rice—a dish you might encounter in Miami, perhaps, or New York City.

Before starting, I spent hours on the phone talking to professional chefs, home cooks, and others who'd grown up with arroz con pollo and make it regularly. They waxed enthusiastically about Puerto Rican versions, Cuban versions, Central American versions, and more. I made six recipes and ordered the dish from a few local restaurants. What I found was that there are as many recipes for arroz con pollo as there are people who cook it. If you grew up with this dish, the version served in your house when you were young remains the only "authentic" version. I set out to make an all-purpose version that nodded to Puerto Rican tradition.

While the common denominators are the chicken and rice, the flavor backbone comes from a *sofrito*, a stable but invigorating base found in many similar dishes. Sofritos vary by the cook but often contain a mixture of onions, peppers, garlic, and herbs. For my sofrito I mixed finely chopped onion, garlic, cumin, cilantro, and a cubanelle pepper (similar to green bell pepper but slightly sweeter and milder). I set the sofrito aside while I browned mixed chicken parts in a Dutch oven. I then removed them and sautéed onion and rice in the chicken fat left behind. Once the rice was nice and toasty, I stirred in chicken broth and the sofrito, added the browned chicken back to the pot, and covered it.

It took about 20 minutes of covered simmering for the rice to become tender and the chicken to cook through, releasing savory aromas into the kitchen. But the rice was unevenly cooked—mushy in certain spots and crunchy in others. And while the chicken's dark meat stayed juicy, the white meat was dry.

One fix was easy: I switched from mixed chicken parts to more forgiving (and more flavorful) thighs. I also removed the skin after browning the pieces; the skin added flavor early on but became gummy if I left it on as the chicken finished cooking.

This supersavory comfort-food classic gets a shot of zing from an herby lemon sauce.

The second fix was also easy: I moved the covered Dutch oven from the stovetop to the more diffuse heat of the oven. I also left the lid on for 15 minutes after removing the pot from the oven to allow the rice to gently finish cooking to a consistent texture.

But it still wasn't perfect; my rice was too sticky. I was using a standard ratio of 3 cups chicken broth to 2 cups rice, but because the chicken was letting off liquid as it cooked, I had rice that was flavorful but mushy. After a couple of tests, I decided to scale back to 2½ cups of broth, just enough to cook the rice through without it feeling stodgy.

Most of the cooks I interviewed told me that medium grain rice was preferred for this dish. Extensive cross testing confirmed that medium grain rice gave me the most creamy, cohesive, evenly cooked result. But I found that long grain rice worked, too (see "Medium Grain Rice").

I was already adding capers and olives, sometimes sold together as *alcaparrado*, for a briny flavor and including a couple of bay leaves for earthiness. But something was missing. Some recipes I found called for marinating the chicken in bitter orange juice, but this resulted in mealy meat. Instead, inspired by recipes from home cooks, I chose a different option: *sazón* spice blend.

In the same way Creole seasoning in New Orleans and Old Bay in Maryland

are go to blends, sazón is common in many Latin home kitchens (see Sazón) It's easy to find, available in most inter national or Latin American food aisles. Just one tablespoon added complexity and brilliant color.

One version of arroz con pollo I found called for a tangy herb sauce on the side Inspired by this, I stirred together a quick sauce using a couple of tablespoons of my already made sofrito, which I'd set aside before cooking, along with a little mayonnaise and some lemon juice. Drizzling this over the dish gave it a final punch of freshness

ARROZ CON POLLO (RICE WITH CHICKEN)

Serves 6

Sazón is a spice blend common in Latin American cooking We developed this recipe with Goya Sazón with Cor ander and Annatto (or *con Culantro y Achiote*) It can be found in the internat onal aisle of most supermarkets, however, other brands will work. (One tablespoon of Goya Sazón equa s about two packets) If you can't find sazón, use our homemade version (recipe follows). You can substitute ¾ cup of chopped green bel pepper for the Cubane e pepper A ow the rice to rest for the full 15 minutes before lifting the lid to check it Long-grain rice may be substituted for medium-grain, but the nce will be slightly ess creamy.

- 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves and stems, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped (1 cup)
- 1 Cubanelle pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped (¾ cup)
- 5 garlic cloves, chopped coarse
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 3½ tablespoons lemon juice (2 lemons), plus lemon wedges for serving
- Salt and pepper
- 6 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 cups medium-grain rice, rinsed
- 1 tablespoon Goya Sazón with Coriander and Annatto
- 2½ cups chicken broth
- ¼ cup pimento-stuffed green olives, halved
- 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ cup frozen peas, thawed (optional)

1. Adjust oven rack to middle posi tion and heat oven to 350 degrees. Process cilantro, ½ cup onion, Cubanelle, garlic, and cumin in food processor until finely chopped, about 20 seconds, scraping down bowl as needed. Transfer sofrito to bowl.

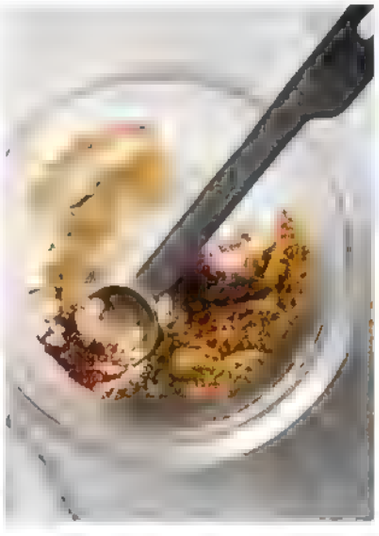
2. Process mayonnaise, 1½ table spoons lemon juice, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and 2 tablespoons sofrito in now-empty processor until almost smooth, about 30 seconds. Transfer mayonnaise herb sauce to small bowl, cover, and refriger ate until ready to serve.

3. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmer ing Add chicken to pot skin side down and cook without moving it until skin is crispy and golden, 7 to 9 minutes. Flip chicken and continue to cook until golden on second side, 7 to 9 min utes longer. Transfer chicken to plate, discard skin.

4. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat from pot and heat over medium heat until shimmering. Add remaining ½ cup onion and cook until softened, 3 to 5 minutes Stir in rice and Sazón and cook until edges of rice begin to turn translucent, about 2 minutes

5. Stir in broth, olives, capers, bay leaves, remaining sofrito, remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper, scraping up any browned bits. Nestle chicken into pot along with any accumulated juices and bring to vigorous summer. Cover, transfer to oven, and bake for 20 minutes.

6. Transfer pot to wire rack and let stand, covered, for 15 minutes. Fluff rice with fork and stir in peas, if using Discard bay leaves. Serve with mayon naise herb sauce and lemon wedges.



HOMEMADE SAZÓN

Makes 1 tablespoon

We add paprika in place of annatto for color In addition to flavoring our Arroz con Pollo, this blend makes a great seasoning for eggs, beans, and fish. Store it in an airtight container for several months.

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin

Combine all ingredients in bowl.

The American Table
Puerto Rican Flavor

Carmen Aboy Valldejuli (at right) worked with her husband Luis on many of the recipes in *Puerto Rican Cookery*, including a chapter on rum cocktails.

Now in its 38th printing, Carmen Aboy Valldejuli's *Puerto Rican Cookery* (1975) stands as one of the most enduring 20th-century cookbooks focused on that island's complex cuisine

Why so complex? As Aboy Va dejuli (cousin to Hollywood star José Ferrer) explains it, "One can seldom be exactly sure of how any really ancient dish began, of course But it is safe to say that our *cocina criolla* [creole cu sine] was initiated by the first human inhab tants of the islands, the Arawaks and the Taínos For almost five hundred years the basic ingredients the ndians used have been enriched by the culinary sk s of newcomers—Spanish, British, French, Danish and Dutch settlers, and slaves brought forcib y from Africa The delicate blends and innovations of five centuries have developed a genuine cu sine " Also traceable back to Taíno culture? Good old American-style barbecue based on techniques the original islanders called *barbacoa*

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT Medium-Grain Rice

After experimenting with long-, medium-, and short-grain rices in our Arroz con Pollo, we decided to call for the medium type, which produced a distinct texture that we preferred. Medium-grain rices (such as Bomba) produced a creamy, cohesive result because their exterior starches thickened the dish while the grains remained firm and distinct Long-grain varieties like basmati or jasmine will do, but the dish will be less creamy. Finally, short-grain varieties, like Arborio or sush rice, produced a creamy texture because short-grain rice starts to release its starch (and more of it) at a lower temperature than long-grain rice does

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT Sazón

Sazón (the term means "seasoning" in Spanish) is the signature spice blend of Lat no home cooks; t's used in every-thing from beans and rice to soups, stews, and more. There are many blends (we call for *Culantro y Achiote* in our Arroz con Po o recipe), and ingredients vary, but sazón traditiona y contains ground annatto (or achiote) seeds, which give dishes a rich yellow color Garlic powder, cumin, and coriander are also often included Sazón also typica y contains monosodium glutamate (MSG) which is what supplies the savoriness Look for sazón in the Lat n American or international section of the supermarket

SIGNATURE SEASONING
There are many Sazón varieties. Make sure you pick the right one.

Photo Top Right Courtesy of Pelican Publishing Co mpany

Getting to Know Useful Scraps

The best way to eliminate food waste in your kitchen is to take a second look at what you might be discarding. Reconsider some of these gems and their untapped potential.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

1 Cilantro Stems

STRAIGHT SHOOTERS

Most recipes that use fresh herbs call for just the leaves. But cilantro stems are very flavorful and relatively soft; we use finely chopped or minced cilantro stems and leaves in all types of Latin- and Asian-inspired dishes, as well as in dips and dressings. Chopped cilantro stems and leaves add a lot of flavor to our recipe for Arroz con Pollo on page 15.

2 Corn Cobs

FLAVOR SPONGE

After you've cut all the kernels from a cob, run the back of a knife over the cob to scrape off the flavorful, pulpy "milk" and add it to the corn during cooking. You can use the cobs to flavor vegetable stock or a soup like our Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken and Corn Soup (**CooksCountry.com/chickencornsoup**). Remove the spent cobs before serving.

3 Hardened Bread

NO LOAFING

You buy a beautiful baguette and enjoy half of it. The next day, it's hard as a brick. Don't throw it away! Remove the crust, tear the bread into rough 1-inch pieces, and blitz it in the food processor. Toast the crumbs (either dry or with butter or oil) and sprinkle them over mac and cheese, pasta dishes, or broiled fish.

4 Watermelon Rind

SWEET SCRAPS

Southerners traditionally pickle watermelon rind. Simply cut away and discard the bright-green exterior, dice and salt the rind until it softens slightly, and then pickle it in a sugary brine; the resulting sticky-sweet pickles resemble a ripe pear in texture. This classic Southern pickle is a treat straight from the jar, wrapped in bacon or ham for an appetizer, or added to a cocktail. Check out our recipe at **CooksCountry.com/pickledwatermelon**.

5 Beet Greens

LEAVES NO TRACE

Beet greens will continue to draw moisture and nutrients from the beets as long as they are attached, so be sure to cut the leaves from the beets before storing them. Wash, dry, and store the greens separately as you would kale or lettuce. You can use beet greens in place of collards in our Quick Collard Greens (**CooksCountry.com/quickcollards**).

6 Chicken Carcass

FLAVOR STOCKED

While store-bought chicken stock is sometimes a necessary convenience, we love the frugality of using the carcasses from a few roasted chickens to make a flavorful stock. The hours of simmering release flavorful marrow from chicken bones and cause collagen to break down into gelatin. Use homemade chicken stock in soups and stews, pan sauces, and gravies.

7 Vanilla Beans

PERFUMED PODS

Vanilla beans are expensive, so it makes sense to try to get your money's worth. Most recipes call for vanilla seeds, but the spent pods, which contain vanillin—the chemical compound that gives the spice its signature aroma and flavor—can be used to make vanilla sugar. Dry the pods thoroughly, place them upright in an airtight container filled with white granulated sugar, and let the mixture sit for about two weeks, agitating it every few days. Use the vanilla sugar (which will keep at room temperature, tightly covered, for about a month) to sweeten coffee or to add subtle vanilla flavor to custards, cookies, or cakes.

8 Shrimp Shells

CREOLE BUILDING BLOCKS

Shrimp shells aren't always discarded—Asian recipes for salt and pepper shrimp call for frying shell-on shrimp until the shells become crispy and edible. But when you do peel shrimp, don't throw the shells away. Crustacean shells contain loads of proteins, sugars, and flavor-boosting compounds called glutamates and nucleotides. We brown shrimp shells in butter, add water, and then simmer to make a rich shrimp stock for our Shrimp and Grits (**CooksCountry.com/shrimpandgrits**).

9 Broccoli Stalks

TOUGH CRUCIFERS

Broccoli stalks are just as edible as the florets, but you'll need to peel away the tough exterior first. The stalks have a wonderful crisp-tender texture when they're cooked properly. We cut the peeled stems into slightly smaller pieces than the florets to ensure that all pieces cook at the same rate in our recipe for Broccoli with Lemon-Oregano Dressing (**CooksCountry.com/microwavebroccoli**).

10 Ham Bones

PORK INFUSER

A ham bone can imbue a soup or stew with loads of flavor and body and can be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and frozen (for up to three months) until you're ready to use it. The smoky ham flavor it imparts is a great match for split pea, lentil, or white bean soup or stew, but be aware that a ham bone will add a good bit of saltiness, too.

11 Parmesan Rind

SAVORY WRAPPER

Bacteria and mold grow on the rinds of aged Parmesan cheese, creating strong aromas and myriad flavor compounds. That's one reason why many Italian recipes for Sunday gravy and minestrone call for adding a Parmesan rind, which is a good source of glutamates (and umami flavor). Here in the test kitchen, we save our Parmesan rinds for—as well as rinds from other aged cheeses like Pecorino Romano and Gruyere—for this purpose

Skillet Peach Upside-Down Cake

Who knew that bright, juicy peaches and cozy, crunchy cornmeal would make such a great pair?

BY STEPHANIE PIXLEY WITH MORGAN BOLING

THE APPEAL OF a peach upside down cake lies in its simplicity. You toss butter, sugar, and peaches together in a skillet; pour a basic batter over them; and bake the whole thing until the batter is cooked through. The moment of truth arrives when you invert the skillet onto a plate to reveal (one hopes) beautifully caramelized peaches perched atop a rustic, not too-sweet cake. But too often the result is overly sweet or, worse, a soggy mess.

When researching peach upside-down cake, I came across several recipes calling for incorporating cornmeal into the cake layer. I loved this rustic, down home idea and headed into the kitchen to try to make it work.

I employed a simple quick bread assembly method: Liquid and dry ingredients are mixed separately and then gently stirred together before being spread over the peaches. This process gave me a strong but still tender texture, and toasting the cornmeal first gave it a subtle roasty flavor.

For the sake of ease, I was hoping to be able to leave the peaches raw, simply cutting them into wedges and arranging them in the bottom of the skillet before topping them with batter. It worked, and it made a beautiful cake, but the overall flavor was lacking. I tried increasing the quantity of peaches to ramp up the peach flavor, but the cake became gummy and dense from all the extra liquid the peaches exuded.

Maybe, I thought, I could get more peach flavor by incorporating a portion of the peaches into the cake batter. No dice: The peaches created gummy pockets throughout the cake. Instead I added a bit of fresh orange zest and juice to the cake batter; this brightened up the flavor and meshed well with the cornmeal.

All of these experiments showed me that more peaches wouldn't necessarily get me more peach flavor. I decided to add another layer of flavor to the dish instead, to provide a counterpoint to the peaches. After toasting the cornmeal, I moved it to a bowl. I melted a few tablespoons of butter in the now empty skillet, whisked in ¼ cup of sugar, and cooked the combination over moderate heat until the sugar turned lightly golden brown, transforming from crystallized clumps to a smooth caramel sauce, a sweet contrasting layer that amplified the peachiness.

I arranged the fruit over the caramel, covered it with the cake batter, put the skillet in the oven, and crossed my fingers. Once the cake was cooked through and allowed to cool slightly, I inverted the pan and knew I'd struck gold: The edges of the cake were golden brown and moist while the peaches held their shape. This cornmeal-peach combination was a winner, with just the right balance of tender cornmeal cake, sweet caramel, and juicy peaches.

PEACH CORNMEAL UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE Serves 8

If using frozen peaches, be sure to thaw and drain them before using; otherwise they will produce a mushy cake. We like to serve this cake with whipped cream.

- ⅓ cup (2⅓ ounces) cornmeal
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus 6 tablespoons melted and cooled
- ⅓ cup (2⅓ ounces) sugar, plus ¾ cup (5¼ ounces)
- Salt
- 1 pound peaches, peeled, halved, pitted, and cut into ¾-inch wedges, or 12 ounces frozen sliced peaches, thawed and drained
- 1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ⅛ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 teaspoons grated orange zest plus ¼ cup juice
- 1 large egg plus 1 large yolk

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Toast cornmeal in ovensafe 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Transfer to large bowl and let cool slightly.

2. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in now-empty skillet over medium heat. Add ⅓ cup sugar and pinch salt and cook, whisking constantly, until sugar is melted, smooth, and deep golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. (Mixture may look broken but will come together.) Off heat, carefully arrange peaches cut side down in tight pinwheel around edge of skillet. Arrange remaining peaches in center of skillet.

3. Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, and ½ teaspoon salt into cornmeal. In separate bowl, whisk milk, orange zest and juice, egg and yolk, melted butter, and remaining ¾ cup sugar until smooth. Stir milk mixture into flour mixture until just combined.

4. Pour batter over peaches and spread into even layer. Bake until cake is golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 28 to 33 minutes, rotating skillet halfway through baking.

5. Let cake cool in skillet on wire rack for 15 minutes. Run knife around edge of skillet to loosen cake. Place large, flat serving platter over skillet. Using potholders and holding platter tightly, invert skillet and platter together; lift off skillet (if any peaches stick to skillet, remove and position on top of cake). Let cake cool completely, about 1 hour. Serve.

To amp up the peachiness, we add both fresh orange juice and grated orange zest.

Picking Peaches for Baking

What do peaches, bananas, and avocados have in common? They all belong to a group of fruits referred to as climacteric; they continue to ripen long after they are picked. And even though peaches become sweeter and more aromatic as they ripen, they also become softer. If you've ever tried to peel and pit a peach at its peak ripeness, you know it can be a challenge. For this recipe, we found that slightly firm peaches worked best. They were still sweet and flavorful, but they didn't crush as we peeled and pitted them.

Fettuccine with Butter and Cheese

Once upon a time, Alfredo sauce was velvety and rich, not stodgy and thick. Could we restore its glory?

BY ASHLEY MOORE

FETTUCCINE WITH BUTTER and cheese, aka fettuccine Alfredo, consists of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, butter, fettuccine, and a pinch of salt. No cream. No eggs. No black pepper. The cheese and butter should combine to create a creamy sauce that coats each strand of pasta. It is one the world's greatest pasta dishes. But this dish has suffered over the years, mucked up with cream, thickeners, and worse.

Its glory days began in 1914, when Roman restaurateur Alfredo di Lelio needed a high-calorie meal to serve his wife, who was pregnant and having trouble keeping her food down. He created the first version of this cheesy dish, hoping that it would hold her over for a while. Bonus: It was also delicious enough to add to his restaurant's menu.

Cue American silent film stars Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks (see "The American Table"), who visited Rome and made several meals of di Lelio's dish. They brought the recipe home, and in 1928, it was printed in *The Rector Cook Book*. But because American butter and Parmesan style cheese weren't as rich and creamy as they are in Italy, the dish began its detour into something di Lelio would not recognize. I was determined to return this dish to its simple origins, using only four ingredients.

OK, five ingredients. I'd also add some of the water I'd cooked the pasta in, using this starchy liquid helps create a silky sauce. The rub proved to be determining exactly how much water to boil the pasta in so that the resulting liquid would have just enough starch. Two quarts was too little, 4 quarts too much. Three quarts of water for a pound of pasta gave me the right consistency.

It's essential to use real Italian Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese; facsimiles won't produce the same creaminess. I tested various amounts and grating styles before settling on 4 ounces of cheese grated on a rasp-style grater for ultrasmall (almost feathery) shreds. These melted more smoothly into the sauce than larger shreds, which clumped.

After cooking dozens of batches using a range of techniques, each fussier than the last, I was thrilled to find that the simplest process also produced the best results: After reserving 1 cup of the cooking water, I drained the pasta; returned it to the pot; added 5 tablespoons of butter, a little salt, the grated cheese, and the reserved cooking water; and vigorously tossed the ingredients with tongs until the sauce covered the pasta. Then—and this step is important—I covered the pot and let the pasta sit for 1 minute to allow any errant drips of water to absorb. I removed the lid and tossed the pasta again to make sure that all the cheese was incorporated.

I transferred the pasta to heated serving bowls and passed them out to the team. The heat of each bowl helped the sauce stay fluid. Would Alfredo di Lelio recognize my dish? I'm certain he would. And he'd love it.

Serving the pasta in heated bowls keeps the sauce soft and silky. Purists say no pepper, but we won't tell if you grind a bit on top.

KEY STEP

Keep on Stirring

When the grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, butter pieces, and reserved pasta cooking water are stirred into the still-hot fettuccine, the dish will appear very watery. But don't fret: After a covered 1-minute rest and a vigorous stir, the sauce will come together, forming a creamy emulsion.

FETTUCCINE WITH BUTTER AND CHEESE

Serves 4 to 6

Be sure to use imported Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese here and not the bland domestic cheese labeled "Parmesan." For the best results, grate the cheese on a rasp-style grater. Do not adjust the amount of water for cooking the pasta. Stir the pasta frequently while cooking so that it doesn't stick together. It's important to move quickly after draining the pasta, as the residual heat from the reserved cooking water and pasta will help the cheese and butter melt. For best results, heat ovensafe dinner bowls in a 200-degree oven for 10 minutes prior to serving and serve the pasta hot. If you are using fresh pasta, increase the amount to 1¼ pounds.

- **1 pound fettuccine**
- **Salt**
- **4 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated (2 cups), plus extra for serving**
- **5 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 5 pieces**

1. Bring 3 quarts water to boil in large Dutch oven. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring frequently, until al dente. Reserve 1 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot.

2. Add Parmigiano-Reggiano, butter, reserved cooking water, and ½ teaspoon salt to pot. Set pot over low heat and, using tongs, toss and stir vigorously to thoroughly combine, about 1 minute. Remove pot from heat, cover, and let pasta sit for 1 minute.

3. Toss pasta vigorously once more so sauce thoroughly coats pasta and any cheese clumps are emulsified into sauce, about 30 seconds. (Mixture may look wet at this point, but pasta will absorb excess moisture as it cools slightly.) Season with salt to taste.

4. Transfer pasta to individual bowls. (Use rubber spatula as needed to remove any clumps of cheese stuck to tongs and bottom of pot.) Serve immediately, passing extra Parmigiano-Reggiano separately.

The American Table
Hollywood's Hottest Invite

These days, Hollywood is known more for juice cleanses and extreme dieting than for actual eating, but things were different in the 1920s, when silent-film stars Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford held court at their sprawling Beverly Hills mansion, Pickfair. It's hard to overstate just how famous the power couple was—Pickford, in particular, was a global celebrity with immense cultural impact—and their lavish dinner parties were legendary, attracting the likes of Gloria Swanson, Henry Ford, and Albert Einstein. On the menu? As often as not, dishes the couple brought back from their European travels, including pasta with butter and Parmesan.

In a recollection for *McCall's*, Pickford wrote: "I saw Professor Einstein demonstrate his Theory of Relativity with a knife, a fork, a plate and the edge of our dining table. I was too awed to ask questions, so I amused myself by studying the open-mouthed attention of Charlie [Chaplin] and Douglas [Fairbanks]."

Which Fettuccine Should You Buy?

Dried fettuccine is a simple product that's been made with two ingredients—flour and water—for centuries. When prepared well, these long, wide noodles are greater than the sum of their short ingredient list, showcasing a clean flavor and a hint of springy chew. To find the best option, 21 America's Test Kitchen staffers tasted four nationally available fettuccines boiled and tossed with neutral-tasting canola oil and in our recipe for Fettuccine with Butter and Cheese.

One product in our lineup, from Ronzoni, was an outlier. Like most fresh—but not dried—fettuccine, it contains eggs and is clearly labeled as "egg fettuccine." (Ronzoni does make an egg-less dried fettuccine, but it's not as widely available throughout the United States.) While our tasters liked this pasta, we preferred the cleaner, less-distracting flavor of those pastas without egg. The Ronzoni fettuccine also comes in only a 12-ounce package—an inconvenience for our recipes, which usually call for a full pound.

In the end, we liked all four pastas. Our tasters had a slight preference for wider, thicker noodles, which we found more substantial and chewy. The higher-ranked noodles measure up to 6.9 millimeters wide and 1.9 millimeters thick when cooked, while lower-ranked noodles were 5.4 millimeters wide and 1.6 millimeters thick.

Garofalo Fettuccine came out on top. These wide, thick noodles were bouncy and springy, with just the right amount of chew. That said, there wasn't a bad noodle in the bunch. Our advice: Choose pastas with shorter ingredient lists, buy what's cheapest, and take pains to cook it well. Read the full story and results chart at **CooksCountry.com/aug16**

—LAUREN SAVOIE

WIDEST NOODLE 6.9 MM

NARROWEST NOODLE 5.4 MM

RECOMMENDED	TASTERS' NOTES
GAROFALO Fettucce **Price:** $3.50 for 16 oz ($0.22 per oz) **Average Thickness:** 1.9 mm **Average Width:** 6.2 mm	These wide, thick noodles cooked up "plump" and "springy," with a "mild," "clean" flavor. When tossed with sauce, this imported Italian pasta retained the "perfect amount of chew" and was "substantial without feeling bulky."
DE CECCO Fettuccine **Price:** $2.99 for 16 oz ($0.19 per oz) **Average Thickness:** 1.6 mm **Average Width:** 6.9 mm	Imported from Italy, these "big, bouncy ribbons" were the widest we tasted, and tasters loved their "sturdy," "toothsome" snap. Their "neutral" flavor had just "a hint of nuttiness" and provided a "clean," "traditional" backdrop for sauce.
BARILLA Classic Blue Box Fettuccine **Price:** $1.45 for 16 oz ($0.09 per oz) **Average Thickness:** 1.7 mm **Average Width:** 5.7 mm	"Springy" with just a touch of chew," this American-made fettuccine won points for its "rustic," "gritty" texture which helped sauce cling to the pasta. Though tasters found these noodles narrow and "a tad thin," most agreed that these "mild," "neutral" strands made a "good canvas" for sauce.
RONZONI Egg Fettuccine **Price:** $2.45 for 12 oz ($0.20 per oz) **Average Thickness:** 1.6 mm **Average Width:** 5.4 mm	These narrower noodles were "chewy," with a prominent "springiness." Some tasters picked up on stronger flavors in this American-made product—which, while not unpleasant, distracted slightly from the sauce. Its 12-ounce package was also problematic for our recipes, which usually call for a full pound of pasta.

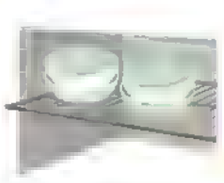
Mastering Fettuccine "Alfredo"

Our Fettuccine with Butter and Cheese has just a few ingredients and comes together quickly. For the best results, follow these guidelines.

Use the best-quality ingredients you can find, including authentic Italian Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Grate the cheese and cut the butter (keep it chilled) before you start to cook.

Move quickly once the pasta is drained—the hot pasta helps melt the butter.



Heat ovensafe dinner bowls in the oven to help keep the pasta hot at the table.

Have diners ready and waiting for the pasta, not the other way around.

Photo: Courtesy of the Rob Brooks Mary Pickford Collection, Toronto. Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

Pletzel

We were latecomers to this old-school deli bread. But now that we've met, we're in love.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

DURING ITS HEYDAY in the 1950s and 1960s, Fritzel's restaurant in Chicago attracted big names Tony Bennett, Phyllis Diller, Joe DiMaggio, and Marilyn Monroe were just some of the celebrities who ate there. And back then, eating at Fritzel's meant sharing one of its most celebrated dishes: pletzel.

This focaccia-like flatbread (sometimes called "onion board") is not as well known as other staples of Jewish delis and bakeries (think bagels and rugelach), but those who know pletzel really love pletzel. It took some doing to find existing recipes for pletzel, but persistence paid off, and I found five, including an old recipe from Fritzel's.

The five versions varied widely. One was thin and brittle like a cracker; others were soft and doughy. The one we liked best had a crisp exterior and a chewy, tender interior with lots of air bubbles. It had a very sticky dough that wasn't easy to work with, but this was the version I decided to pursue.

My first fix to the recipe proved to be the best fix: Rather than kneading the wet, sticky dough (a ridiculous mess), I resolved to let the stand mixer deal with it. I attached the dough hook to the stand mixer and combined flour, water, and a bit of salt. I then let it sit for 20 minutes to allow the flour to fully hydrate—a step our resident bread expert recommended to help ensure that chewy interior. At that point, I added the yeast and a bit of sugar for sweetness and browning and set the mixer on high for about 10 minutes until the dough was glossy and began to pull away from the edges of the mixer bowl.

I turned out the dough into a large oiled bowl, covered it with plastic wrap, and set it aside to rise. After about 2 hours, it had tripled in volume. I transferred it to a well-oiled rimmed baking sheet and pressed it flat, nudging it into the corners as best I could. (This sticky task was easier to do with lightly oiled hands.)

But the dough kept springing back, so I stepped away for a moment, hoping that if I let the dough relax for a few minutes, it would be easier to cover the entire baking sheet. I was right. I let the dough rise for 30 more minutes before sliding it into a very hot (500-degree) oven. About 20 minutes later, my pletzel came out even and crisp, and the holes in its interior were exactly what I wanted.

Next: Toppings. I put together another pletzel dough. While it was rising on the sheet, I gently cooked chopped onions and a bit of salt in a skillet until they were golden. I then stirred in some poppy seeds and spread the mixture evenly over the risen dough before it went into the oven.

Once the pletzel was baked, I cut it into squares and called over my tasters. It was crispy on the outside and soft and chewy on the inside, with plenty of sweet, oniony topping. Although a celebrity-filled visit to Fritzel's is impossible now (it was shuttered in the early 1970s), I'd re-created a little part of it.

The caramelized onions and poppy seeds give this crisp-chewy flatbread a slightly sweet note

PLETZEL Serves 6 to 8

We found that while kneading the dough in a stand mixer on high speed, the mixer tended to wobble. To prevent this, place a towel or shelf liner under the mixer and watch it during mixing. Handle the dough with your lightly oiled hands and resist flouring your fingers or the dough might stick. Plan ahead. The dough needs to rise for about 3 hours before baking.

- 3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1⅔ cups water, room temperature
- Kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1¼ teaspoons sugar
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 onions, chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons poppy seeds

1. Place towel or shelf liner beneath stand mixer to prevent wobbling and fit mixer with dough hook. Add flour, room temperature water, and 2½ teaspoons salt to bowl and mix on low speed until no patches of dry flour remain, about 4 minutes, occasionally scraping sides and bottom of bowl. Turn off mixer and let dough rest for 20 minutes.

2. Sprinkle yeast and sugar over dough. Knead on low speed until fully combined, about 2 minutes, occasionally scraping sides and bottom of bowl. Increase mixer speed to high and knead until dough is glossy, smooth, and pulls away from sides of bowl, 8 to 10 minutes. (Dough will only pull away from sides while mixer is on. When mixer is off, dough will fall back to sides.)

AT A GLANCE **Shaping Pletzel**

If the dough resists stretching, let it relax for 5 to 10 minutes and then try again.

Using your oiled fingertips, press dough toward edge of baking sheet. Let it rise, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Stretch again, then poke surface all over with fork.

Brush dough with oil and sprinkle with salt. Distribute onion–poppy seed mixture over dough, leaving ½-inch border around edge.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

3. Using your fingers, coat large bowl and rubber spatula with 1 tablespoon oil. Using oiled spatula, transfer dough to bowl and pour 1 tablespoon oil over top. Flip dough over once so it is well coated with oil, cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap. Let dough rise at room temperature until nearly tripled in volume and large bubbles have formed, 2 to 2½ hours.

4. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12 inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add onions and 1 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are golden brown, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in poppy seeds Transfer to bowl; set aside. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 500 degrees.

5. Coat bottom and sides of rimmed baking sheet with 1 table spoon oil. Using oiled rubber spatula, turn dough out onto prepared sheet along with any oil remaining in bowl

6. Using your oiled fingertips, press dough out toward edges of sheet, taking care not to tear it. (Dough will not fit snugly into corners. If dough resists stretching, let it relax for 5 to 10 minutes before trying to stretch again.) Let dough rise, uncovered, at room temperature for 30 minutes. (Dough will increase but not quite double in volume)

7. Using your oiled fingertips, press dough out toward edges of sheet once more. Using dinner fork, poke surface of dough 30 to 40 times. Brush top of dough with remaining 1 tablespoon oil and sprinkle with 1½ teaspoons salt. Distribute onion poppy seed mixture evenly over dough, leaving ½ inch border around edge

8. Bake until golden brown, 18 to 23 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Using metal spatula, transfer pletzel to cutting board. Slice and serve

TO MAKE AHEAD

Once dough has been placed in oiled bowl, flipped to coat in oil, and covered in step 3, it can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours Let dough come to room temperature, 2 to 2½ hours, before proceeding with step 4

The Ultimate BLT

Do you really need a recipe for this simple classic? If you want the ultimate version, indeed you do. BY KATE LEAIRD

Doctored mayonnaise and partially toasted bread set this BLT above the rest

IS THERE A more perfect sandwich than the BLT? Crispy, savory bacon; juicy, ripe tomato; and cool, crunchy lettuce, dressed in tangy mayonnaise and bookended by two pieces of perfectly toasted bread — it's no wonder it's a classic.

But for something so simple, so much can go wrong. The bacon slides free and the tomatoes slink out, leaving just soggy bread and sad lettuce

I set out to solve these structural snafus First up: bread. We chose toasted potato bread for its subtle sweetness, but toast can be brittle; soft slices hold on to contents better. So I split the difference, toasting just one side of the bread.

I wanted the bacon to be shatteringly crispy, easier to achieve with standard bacon than with thick cut. Cooking it all at once on a foil lined baking sheet in the oven sped things up (no batches) Of the many lettuce options we considered, lightly crunchy Bibb lettuce proved the best choice.

To ensure a bright tomato flavor, even with less than perfect tomatoes, I chose to briefly marinate them in red wine vinegar, olive oil, and a bit of salt and pepper. And to elevate my mayonnaise, I stirred in a bit of lemon juice, cayenne, and chopped basil.

Achieving the Ultimate

Easy adjustments go a long way with familiar components

BREAD Use potato bread, and toast only one side

MAYO Season it with basil, lemon juice, and cayenne

BACON Cook it longer so that it's extra-crispy.

LETTUCE Use lightly crunchy Bibb lettuce that stays put.

TOMATO Coat them with vinaigrette for a flavor boost

With my ingredients rounded up, it was time to optimize the architecture. I grabbed a pencil and sketched a few possibilities. While two layers of bacon were a must, one layer of tomato was plenty. The mayonnaise would serve as an edible adhesive to keep the bacon in place, the lettuce as a shield against soggy bread. My final sketch held the winning design. From top to bottom bread, mayonnaise, bacon, lettuce, tomato, lettuce, bacon, mayonnaise, bread. With just a little extra attention and effort, I'd transformed the everyday BLT into something so much more

ULTIMATE BLT SANDWICH

Serves 4

Buy the best tomatoes you can find that are about 2 inches in diameter. If your tomatoes happen to be larger, use only two or three slices per sandwich. Since broiler outputs vary, keep an eye on the toast in step 3. You may need more than one package to get 16 slices of bacon. Do not use thick-cut bacon in this recipe

- **16 slices bacon**
- **3 vine-ripened tomatoes**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 tablespoon red wine vinegar**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **½ cup mayonnaise**
- **¼ cup chopped fresh basil**
- **1½ teaspoons lemon juice**
- **Pinch cayenne pepper**
- **8 slices potato sandwich bread**
- **1 head Bibb lettuce (8 ounces), leaves separated**

1. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat oven to 400 degrees. Arrange bacon in single layer on aluminum foil lined rimmed baking sheet, overlapping slightly as needed to fit. Bake until bacon is deeply browned and crispy, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Transfer bacon to paper towel lined plate; discard bacon fat and foil. Heat broiler.

2. Meanwhile, core tomatoes and cut into 16 (¼ inch thick) slices (you may have some left over). Whisk oil, vinegar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in shallow dish. Add tomatoes; turn gently to coat with vinaigrette. Whisk mayonnaise, basil, lemon juice, and cayenne together in bowl.

3. Arrange bread on now empty sheet. Broil until lightly browned on 1 side only, 1 to 2 minutes

4. Transfer bread, toasted side down, to cutting board. Spread basil mayonnaise evenly on untoasted sides of bread (use all of it). Break bacon slices in half. Shingle 4 bacon halves on each of 4 bread slices, followed by 2 lettuce leaves, 4 tomato slices, 2 more lettuce leaves, and 4 more bacon halves. Top each sandwich with 1 of 4 remaining bread slices, mayonnaise side down. Cut sandwiches in half, corner to corner. Serve

Oregon Blackberry Pie

The hallmark of this summertime showstopper is the sturdy blackberry filling. But getting it right wasn't as easy as pie. BY CECELIA JENKINS

IN HIGH SUMMER, blackberry brambles blanket the Pacific Northwest, and a slice of black berry pie is never far from reach. In Oregon it's known as marionberry pie, named after the native blackberry variety prized by pie makers. Cut into a good example of this seasonal staple and you'll see what sets it apart from other fruit pies: You won't get a soupy, oozy slice Instead, the purple filling retains its shape.

But how? Aficionados I spoke with claimed that there are no tricky tricks, no added pectin or gelatin, noth ing stranger than a bit of starch. As trustworthy as my sources were, I was skeptical. Could I create a cohesive blackberry filling with tart, clean, fresh summertime flavor? Only one way to find out. I grabbed a handful of exist ing recipes and got to baking

Settling on a crust was the easy part. Tasters preferred the flavor of pies with all butter crusts to crusts that used shortening. After a few quick tests, I settled on the test kitchen's recipe for all butter pie crust, with 3 tablespoons of sour cream added for a richer dough that was just a bit easier to roll out. Bonus: The acid in the sour cream inhibited the gluten from overdevelop ing and becoming tough. And because I knew I'd need to leave open some avenues for evaporation, I chose to follow the example set by blackberry pie pros and use a lattice top

Now for the filling. Before tackling the puzzle of a thick filling that would hold its shape, I nailed down the fla vors. Heavily sweetened pies and added spices confused the blackberry flavor. After baking several pies with different ratios of flavors, I settled on ¾ cup of sugar, a bit of salt, and a good hit of lemon juice for a sweet enough filling with clear and present blackberry flavor.

But my pies were soupy. A thickener was essential. I needed to take care here; the thickener couldn't influence the flavors, and it also had to help create a smooth, cohesive texture that held its shape without being like Jell O

Simply smashing some of the ber ries should, in theory, release more of the natural pectin found in the ber ries to help set the pie. But with this technique, the filling felt jammy, and besides, tasters preferred whole berries.

I tried tapioca, a favorite test kitchen thickener, but this created a gelatin like texture. Flour turned things gluey. I landed on cornstarch, which gave me a good texture and didn't muck up the flavor After testing amounts from 1 teaspoon to ½ cup, I learned that 5 tablespoons did the trick.

One final touch made this pie even easier: I developed a quicker, more foolproof lattice top by simply laying four horizontal strips across the pie and

For a cohesive berry filling, we fried a number of thickeners One option, cornstarch, gave us the best texture—neither gluey nor jammy.

Bake on Parchment-Lined Baking Sheet

Why? Because you never know when a pie made with a buttery pastry and juicy berries will drip. A protective sheet of parchment means there will be no st cky, greasy, or burnt-on mess to clean up

then four vertical strips over those. This gave the same woven effect without my having to weave the strips together. I had a beautiful, flavorful blackberry pie to be proud of

OREGON BLACKBERRY PIE Serves 8

Be sure to rinse the berries and dry them thoroughly before using. Do not use frozen berries in this recipe. Freezing the butter for the dough for 15 minutes before processing it in step 1 is crucial to the flaky texture of this crust—do not skip this step. If working in a hot kitchen, refrigerate all the ingredients before making the dough. Plan ahead: The pie dough needs to chill for at least an hour before rolling. When brushing the lattice strips with egg wash, be sure to leave the ends of each strip unbrushed so the wash doesn't impede the crimping process.

PIE DOUGH

- ⅓ cup ice water, plus extra as needed
- 3 tablespoons sour cream
- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch pieces and frozen for 15 minutes

FILLING

- ¾ cup (5¼ ounces) sugar, plus 1 teaspoon for topping
- 5 tablespoons (1¼ ounces) cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 20 ounces (4 cups) blackberries
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces

- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

1. FOR THE PIE DOUGH: Mix ice water and sour cream in bowl. Process flour, sugar, and salt in food processor until combined, about 5 seconds. Scatter butter over top and pulse until butter is size of large peas, about 10 pulses.

2. Pour half of sour cream mixture into bowl with flour mixture and pulse until incorporated, about 3 pulses. Scrape down bowl and repeat with remaining sour cream mixture. Pinch dough with your fingers; if dough feels dry and does not hold together, sprinkle 1 to 2 tablespoons extra ice water over mixture and pulse until dough forms large clumps and no dry flour remains, 3 to 5 pulses.

3. Transfer dough to lightly floured counter. Divide dough in half and form each half into 4-inch disk. Wrap disks tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour. (Wrapped dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 1 month. If frozen, let dough thaw completely on counter before rolling.)

4. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Let chilled dough sit on counter to soften slightly, about 10 minutes, before rolling. Roll 1 disk of dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto 9-inch pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into plate bottom with your other hand.

5. Wrap dough-lined plate loosely in plastic and refrigerate until dough is firm, about 30 minutes. Roll other disk of dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter, then transfer to parchment paper–lined baking sheet. Using pizza cutter, cut dough into twelve 1-inch strips. Discard 4 short end pieces, then cover remaining 8 long strips with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

6. FOR THE FILLING: Whisk sugar, cornstarch, and salt together in large bowl. Add blackberries and toss gently to coat. Add lemon juice and toss until no dry sugar mixture remains. (Black berries will start to exude some juice.)

7. Transfer blackberry mixture to dough-lined pie plate and dot with butter. Lay 4 dough strips parallel to each other across pie, about 1 inch apart. Brush strips with egg, leaving ½ inch at ends unbrushed. Lay remaining 4 strips perpendicular to first layer of strips, about 1 inch apart.

8. Pinch edges of lattice strips and bottom crust firmly together. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Tuck overhang under itself; folded edge should be flush with edge of plate. Crimp dough evenly around edge of plate using your fingers.

9. Brush lattice top and crimped edge with egg and sprinkle with remaining 1 teaspoon sugar. Set pie on parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake until golden brown and juices bubble evenly along surface, 45 to 50 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cool on wire rack for at least 4 hours before serving.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Foolproof Lattice**

A lattice is essential for most berry pies since its open design lets steam escape during baking, preventing a soggy crust. But weaving a lattice from delicate pastry dough can be frustrating, even for seasoned bakers. Our streamlined approach produces a faux lattice that's just as beautiful as the real thing.

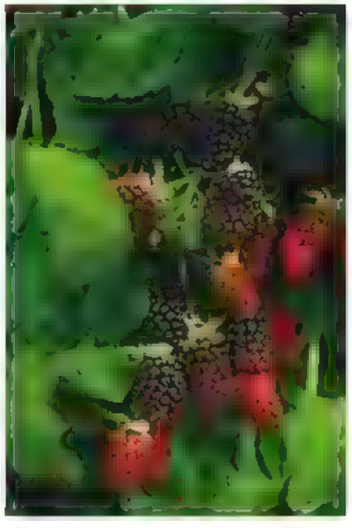
1. Cut dough into twelve 1-inch strips. Discard 4 short end pieces. Cover remaining 8 long strips with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

2. Lay 4 parallel strips about 1 inch apart. Brush with egg, leaving ½ inch at ends unbrushed. Lay remaining 4 strips perpendicular to first layer, about 1 inch apart.

3. Pinch edges of lattice strips and bottom crust firmly together. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Tuck overhang under itself. Crimp edge.

The American Table

The Cabernet of Blackberries



With its warm summer days and cool, clear nights, the Pacific Northwest's climate is ideal for growing berries, including a prized variety of blackberry called the marionberry, or Marion blackberry. The berry, which ranges from dark purple to black in color when fully ripe (red berries still need time to ripen and develop flavor), is named for Marion County, the home of Oregon's state capital, Salem. Oregon produces about 30 million pounds of the fruit annually, and 90 percent of commercial marionberries are grown in Marion County. Because the sweet earthy berries tend to have a little more juice and a sweeter flavor than other common blackberry varieties, they are sometimes referred to as the "Cabernet of blackberries."—REBECCA HAYS

Berries 101

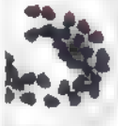
When you're dealing with delicate berries, a little know-how goes a long way toward keeping them fresh.

SHOPPING

Even one moldy berry will encourage the rest of the container to rot. We recommend opening the plastic carton to inspect berries before you purchase them.

WASHING

Washing berries before you use them is always a safe practice, and we think the best way is to place the berries in a colander and rinse them gently under running water for at least 30 seconds.



DRYING

To avoid bruising the delicate fruit, line a salad spinner with a buffering layer of paper towels before adding the berries and spinning them dry.

STORING

Berries are prone to growing mold and rotting quickly. If the berries aren't to be used immediately, we recommend submerging them in a mild vinegar solution (3 cups of water mixed with 1 cup of white vinegar), which will destroy the bacteria, before drying them. Refrigerate them in a paper towel–lined airtight container.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece; Photo (marionberries): Michael Boys/Corbis/VCG

Cooking Class English Muffin Bread

A good loaf of English muffin bread has the same chewy crumb and porous texture as individual English muffins. It also takes a fraction of the time to make. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

ENGLISH MUFFIN BREAD **Makes 2 loaves**

The test kitchen's preferred loaf pan measures 8½ by 4½ inches; if using 9 by 5-inch pans, check for doneness 5 minutes early. English muffin bread is designed to be toasted after it is sliced.

- Cornmeal
- 5 cups (27½ ounces) bread flour
- 4½ teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 cups warm whole milk (120 degrees)

1. Grease two 8½ by 4½ inch loaf pans and dust with cornmeal. Combine flour, yeast, sugar, salt, and baking soda in large bowl. Stir in warm milk until combined, about 1 minute. Cover dough with greased plastic wrap and let rise in warm place for 30 minutes, or until dough is bubbly and has doubled in size.

2. Stir dough and divide between prepared pans, pushing into corners with greased rubber spatula. (Pans should be about two-thirds full.) Cover pans with greased plastic and let dough rise in warm place until it reaches edges of pans, about 30 minutes. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees.

3. Discard plastic and transfer pans to oven. Bake until bread is well browned and registers 200 degrees, about 30 minutes, switching and rotating pans halfway through baking. Turn bread out onto wire rack and let cool completely, about 1 hour. Slice, toast, and serve.

The American Table

How English Muffins Evolved into Bread

There is a long history of English muffins in England, where they are simply called "muffins." The first published recipe appeared in 1747 in Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, an English cookbook that was also quite popular among American cooks. At that time, Englanders could find the "Muffin Man" peddling his wares (wrapped in flannel to keep them warm) as he roamed the streets at teatime, ringing his bell. By the 1850s recipes began appearing in American cookbooks, including "The Hot Muffins of Old England," which appeared in *The American Matron: or, Practical and Scientific Cookery* (1851), by "A Housekeeper." In the mid-1960s, English muffin bread entered the scene as a commercial product when supermarket chains began baking and selling private-label muffin bread. "Makes great toast," was a frequent selling point.

—REBECCA HAYS

STEP BY STEP **Ten Steps to English Muffin Bread**

1. PREPARE PANS
Grease two 8½ by 4½-inch loaf pans and dust them with cornmeal.
WHY? Dusting with cornmeal ensures that the bread releases easily and also produces the iconic gritty crust of English muffins.

2. USE BREAD FLOUR
Add 5 cups of bread flour to a large bowl.
WHY? Bread flour, which has more protein than all-purpose flour, gives the crumb a porous, chewy texture. Using all-purpose flour will make the crumb too tender.

3. ADD TWO LEAVENERS
Combine yeast and baking soda with flour, sugar, and salt.
WHY? Yeast adds flavor and helps small air bubbles develop in the dough; baking soda makes the bubbles grow even larger to create the bread's trademark coarse texture.

4. HEAT MILK
Use 3 cups of whole milk heated to 120 degrees.
WHY? Older recipes call for heating the flour in the oven to jump-start the rise. We found it easier to microwave the milk before stirring it into the flour mixture.

5. GREASE PLASTIC WRAP
Cover the dough with greased plastic wrap and let it rise in a warm place for 30 minutes.
WHY? This dough is sticky and wet, so if you don't grease the plastic, you'll tear the dough when you remove the plastic.

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR ANY BREAD

Good to Know

YEAST ONLY
Good rise; small air bubbles

YEAST + BAKING SODA
Good rise; big and small air bubbles

In Search of Nooks and Crannies

We tested a number of English muffin bread recipes—some dating back to the turn of the 19th century—but only those that included baking soda boasted the nooks and crannies we've come to associate with English muffins. That's because while yeast helps the dense dough rise and creates small air bubbles in the dough, baking soda helps those bubbles grow even larger. Here's how it works: During fermentation, yeast breaks down starch into sugars and produces carbon dioxide and alcohol as well as lactic and acetic acids. When baking soda reacts with the acids, it rapidly releases even more carbon dioxide, creating the large bubbles that become the signature nooks and crannies. The large amount of yeast in this recipe—4½ teaspoons—produces more than enough acid to react with the baking soda and cause the bubbles to expand.

The Importance of Bread Flour

While we have found that all-purpose flour often lives up to its name, some breads, including our English Muffin Bread, require a higher-protein flour to achieve the proper texture. All-purpose flour contains about 10 to 12 percent protein; bread flour contains 12 to 14 percent. The higher the protein level, the more structure and chew in the end product. To wit: A rustic Italian loaf made with bread flour will have a sturdy, chewy crumb, whereas a quick bread made with all-purpose flour will be soft and tender.

Bread Bakers' Secrets

A Warm Place to Rise

Since yeast is most active at temperatures between 80 and 90 degrees, dough will rise most successfully in a warm space that is free of drafts. If your kitchen is on the chilly side, microwave 1½ cups of water in a measuring cup until simmering and then place the steaming cup in a turned-off oven or microwave, or even in a cooler, along with the covered bowl of dough. Close the door or lid and let the dough rise according to the recipe.

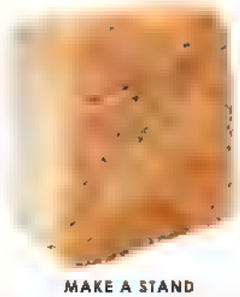
OVEN (TURNED OFF)

MICROWAVE (TURNED OFF)

COOLER

How to Keep Bread Fresher Longer

When a local baker recommended storing leftover bread cut side down on a cutting board for up to 24 hours, we were intrigued. Indeed, when we compared this approach with storing the bread in a paper or plastic bag, the countertop loaf remained crisp on the outside and tender on the inside, while the paper-bag and plastic-bag methods were less successful, producing slightly dry or squishy results, respectively.



MAKE A STAND
For short-term storage, stand leftover bread cut side down on a cutting board.

Freeze Some for Later

Leftovers can be sliced (place parchment paper between slices), wrapped in aluminum foil, placed in a zipper-lock bag, and frozen for up to 1 month. We found that letting the slices defrost at room temperature caused them to stale slightly. The best way to thaw frozen slices for toasting is to place the slices on a plate (uncovered) and microwave them on high for 15 to 25 seconds.

6. STIR RISEN DOUGH
Stir the dough and divide it between the prepared pans, pushing it into the corners with a greased rubber spatula.
WHY? Stirring redistributes yeasts and sugars and lightly deflates the batter-like dough, both of which prepare it for a second rise.

7. PROOF DOUGH IN PANS
Cover the pans with greased plastic and let the dough rise in a warm place until it reaches the edges of the pans.
WHY? Allowing the dough to rise a second time produces a consistent, porous crumb.

8. SWITCH AND ROTATE
Switch and rotate the pans halfway through baking.
WHY? Since most ovens don't heat evenly, moving the pans during baking helps ensure even rising and browning.

9. TAKE TEMP
Bake until the bread is well browned and registers 200 degrees, about 30 minutes.
WHY? Beyond looking for a properly browned exterior, the best way to tell if your bread is done is by using an instant-read thermometer.

10. LET COOL COMPLETELY
Turn the bread out onto a wire rack and let it cool completely before slicing it, about 1 hour.
WHY? When the bread is hot, its interior is very moist. As the bread cools, starches inside the loaf dry and firm up, making the bread easier to slice without tearing.

Illustration: Rass Max Donald

One-Pan Dinner Steak with Sweet Potatoes and Scallions

A nicely cooked steak with a great sear and sides, all ready at once? We doubted it, too. BY KATIE LEAIRD

WHEN WE COOK steaks in the test kitchen, we usually sear them in a hot pan or grill them over a blazing fire to achieve a brown crust around tender, juicy meat. But I wanted to make dinner for four with vegetables as well as strip steaks, dirty only one pan in the process, and have everything ready at the same time. Impossible? We'd see about that.

I started by simply roasting a steak on a rimmed baking sheet. The results were unsurprising: a sad, gray steak without any crust. I missed the intensified flavors that come with searing. But in order to achieve browning, meat requires direct contact with a heating element, which isn't exactly what the oven is built for.

In a bid to simulate the direct, searing heat of a stovetop skillet, I tried preheating the baking sheet in a 450-degree oven. After a half hour I held my breath, opened the oven, placed the steaks on the hot sheet, and heard a satisfying sizzle. Promising.

The time it took to preheat the sheet was just enough time to jump-start my sides. I began with sweet potatoes—cut into wedges, tossed with olive oil, and seasoned with salt and pepper—which I knew would roast into soft, flavorful fries in about 40 minutes. To have them finish concurrently with the steak, they'd need a 25-minute head start in the oven, which was plenty of time to also get the baking sheet hot enough to sear the steaks. I contained the sweet potatoes on one side of the sheet so I wouldn't have to move them later. After 25 minutes, I placed the steaks on the empty side of the screaming-hot sheet. After another 15 minutes, the steaks were perfectly medium-rare, and the sweet potatoes were ready to serve. Granted, the steaks were brown on only one side, the "presentation" side, but my tasters liked it.

Not good enough: I wanted them to love it. Could I achieve that by adding a rub for my steak? We tossed out ideas—salt, garlic powder, the usual suspects—until someone mentioned coffee.

Coffee? Yes, coffee. I didn't want to turn my dinner into a cappuccino-flavored novelty, but I hoped coffee's bitter note would accentuate the savoriness of the steak without introducing strong coffee flavor. I mixed some finely ground coffee with chili powder for heat and brown sugar for sweetness and caramelizing properties. This rub gave the steak a gorgeous mahogany color and enhanced the crust even more.

To green up the meal, I tossed scallions with olive oil, salt, and pepper and put them on top of the sweet potatoes, but they shriveled up into a stringy mess after 40 minutes in the oven. I tried waiting to add the scallions at the same time as the steaks. Fifteen minutes in the oven was much kinder to the scallions. Some red radishes, tossed with lime juice and salt, made for a fresh, crunchy finish.

Potatoes First, Steaks Second
Start by roasting the sweet potatoes alone on the sheet. When the potatoes start to soften, arrange the scallions on top of them and place the steaks alongside the potatoes. The upshot? Medium-rare meat and perfectly tender sweet potatoes.

KEY INGREDIENT: Ground Coffee
Yes, we put ground coffee in the rub for our steaks. But don't worry: The steaks don't taste overtly of coffee. Rather, the coffee adds a subtle bitterness and gives the steaks an attractive dark color.

A simple rub of sugar, coffee, and chili powder on the steak helps seal in the sear

ONE-PAN STEAK WITH SWEET POTATOES AND SCALLIONS

Serves 4

Don't be afraid to use all of the coffee rub on the steak. It aids in browning as well as adds flavor. The scallions should be left whole; only remove the root hairs.

- 1½ pounds sweet potatoes, unpeeled, cut lengthwise into 1-inch wedges
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 16 scallions, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon finely ground coffee
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 2 (1-pound) boneless strip steaks, 1½ to 1¾ inches thick
- 10 radishes, trimmed and sliced thin
- 1 tablespoon lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Toss potatoes, 1½ tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Arrange potatoes skin side down in single layer on half of rimmed baking sheet. Roast until potatoes begin to soften, about 25 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, toss scallions with remaining ½ tablespoon oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in now-empty bowl. Mix sugar, coffee, chili powder, 1½ teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in small bowl. Pat steaks dry with paper towels, then sprinkle all over with coffee mixture.

3. Arrange scallions on top of potatoes. Place steaks on empty side of sheet. Roast until potatoes are fully tender and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 12 to 15 minutes.

4. Transfer steaks bottom side up to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Toss radishes, lime juice, and ¼ teaspoon salt together in bowl. Slice steaks thin against grain and serve with potatoes, scallions, radishes, and lime wedges.

Cooking For Two Cherry-Almond Crisp

We wanted a quick, juicy fruit crisp for any day of the week, at any time of the year.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

CHERRY CRISP IS a delightful mix of textures: juicy, vibrant fruit nestled beneath a toasty, crisp streusel topping But does it need to be a multipan, multidish process? I hoped not.

I decided early on to use sweet, not sour, cherries. They're much easier to find and, of course, they're sweeter (this is dessert, after all). And while I love the flavor and texture of fresh cherries, I wanted this to be a dessert I could make year-round, so I decided to go with frozen cherries. I found that, when mixed with sugar, lemon juice, and vanilla extract, they tasted just as good as fresh. Plus, they don't need to be pitted. A 10-ounce bag was just right for two servings and cut the prep time dramatically. To keep this recipe quick, I resolved to keep it on the stovetop.

Even cherries straight from the freezer cooked quickly on the stovetop, releasing their juice and softening to a luxurious texture in less than 10 minutes. For added punch, I buoyed the frozen cherries with a few dried cherries, which delivered intense flavor and just a bit of chewiness. I found that just ½ teaspoon of cornstarch, which I'd tossed with sugar to help keep it from clumping, was sufficient to thicken the filling.

For a simple topping that would stay crisp even when it hit the cherry filling, I gathered the usual ingredients—old-fashioned rolled oats, brown sugar, cinnamon, and butter—and mixed them together. I toasted this mixture in a small skillet, breaking it into small clumps. The pieces browned nicely but didn't have the crunchy bite I'd hoped to achieve.

Well, nuts are crunchy, and since almonds complement cherries particularly well, I replaced the rolled oats in my topping with ¼ cup of sliced almonds. The added texture was a boon to the streusel, but the almonds didn't have time to brown before the rest of the topping began to burn. So I tried toasting the almonds slightly before adding the remaining ingredients. This step evened out the browning, yielding a fragrant, toasty topping in no time at all. What's more, I was so taken with the almond flavor that I added just a bit of almond extract to the filling, too.

As I looked over my recipe, I realized that I could save a step (and a pan to wash) if I toasted the topping first and set it aside to cool while I cooked the cherry filling in the same skillet. Once the filling had thickened, I scattered the topping from edge to edge and returned the pan to the heat until the filling began to bubble. Served right from the skillet after a short cooldown, the results were spot-on.

CHERRY-ALMOND CRISP FOR TWO

There's no need to thaw the cherries. Serve with vanilla ice cream.

TOPPING

- ⅓ cup (1⅔ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch ground cinnamon
- Pinch salt
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup sliced almonds

FILLING

- 1½ tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon cornstarch
- 10 ounces frozen sweet cherries
- ¼ cup water
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon almond extract
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup dried cherries

1. FOR THE TOPPING: Combine flour, brown sugar, granulated sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, and salt in bowl. Stir in melted butter until mixture resembles wet sand and no dry flour remains.

2. Toast almonds in 8-inch skillet over medium-low heat until just beginning to brown, about 4 minutes. Add flour mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until lightly browned, about 4 minutes; transfer to plate to cool. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

3. FOR THE FILLING: Combine 1½ teaspoons sugar and cornstarch in small bowl; set aside. Combine sweet cherries, water, lemon juice, vanilla, almond extract, salt, and remaining 1 tablespoon sugar in now-empty skillet. Cook, covered, over medium heat until cherries thaw and release their juice and mixture starts to simmer, about 5 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking. Stir in dried cherries and simmer, uncovered, until plumped and tender, about 2 minutes.

4 Stir in cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is thickened, about 30 seconds. Remove skillet from heat and sprinkle topping evenly over filling. Return skillet to medium-low heat and cook until filling is bubbling around edges, about 1 minute. Remove from heat and let cool for at least 15 minutes. Serve warm.

For this simple stovetop recipe, we rely on a mixture of frozen cherries (no need to thaw) and dried cherries. Both are readily available year-round and don't require pitting.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT
Dried Cherries

Frozen sweet cherries are the backbone of our Cherry-Almond Crisp, providing mild sweetness and lots of juiciness. But to really punch up the cherry flavor, we add a handful of dried cherries to the mix. They offer a pleasant chewy texture, concentrated sweetness, and intense fruitiness.

VERY CHERRY
Dried cherries deliver an intense pop of flavor to our crisp.

One Dessert, Two Sugars

The ingredient list for our crisp's cherry filling calls for granulated sugar—its clean, unobtrusive sweetness bolsters the fruit while letting its flavor (augmented by lemon juice and vanilla and almond extracts) shine. The ingredient list for the topping, however, calls for a 50/50 mixture of granulated and brown sugars. Brown sugar is simply cane sugar with molasses added, which contributes flavor and moisture. In our topping, the brown sugar offers complexity and helps keep the topping from getting brittle.

Five Easy Lemonades

Homemade lemonade is refreshing, invigorating, and much better than store-bought. It's also easier to make than you might think. BY CECILIA JENKINS

IT'S TEMPTING TO reach for bottled lemonades in the grocery store beverage case—what could be more convenient? Unfortunately, many of these cheek sucking versions are packed with sugar, flavorings, and colorings—and not much else (often they don't even contain real lemon juice). They pale in comparison with homemade, in which lemons add dimension and freshness you just can't find in the supermarket. I wanted a simple recipe for refreshing lemonade that balanced sweetness and tartness—a reward worth all the squeezing

Lemonade requires sweetening Many recipes call for doing so with simple syrup (a boiled mixture of sugar and water) to help the sugar dissolve easily. While simple syrup is indeed simple to make, it needs to cool back to room temperature before it's added a speed bump I wanted to avoid.

I decided to start off by simply whisking sugar, lemon juice, and water together. I was happy to find that it worked just fine (the sugar dissolved without falling out of suspension), but then I took a sip. For fresh lemonade, it was dull. No zing. I began to see the appeal of using the peel called for in some recipes.

A past test kitchen recipe for lemonade took a cue from bartenders, who often mash (or muddle) herbs or fruit with sugar to make flavorful cocktails. Mashing lemon slices with sugar to extract the oils from the zest (prior to whisking in the juice and water) seemed easy enough. I worried that the lemon's white pith would impart bitterness, but I grabbed a potato masher and made a batch anyway Bingo. I got the fragrant, bright, fresh boost I wanted, with no bitterness.

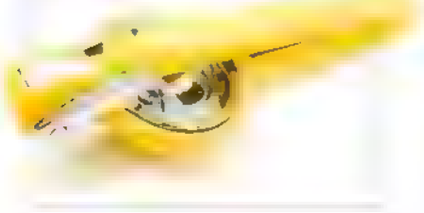
I tried a few more tweaks to see if further improvement was possible. Muddling more lemons only made the lemonade more sour. Adding lemon zest to the lemonade made it gritty. One muddled lemon was just right.

With a refreshing glass of lemonade in hand (refrigerated for an hour to help keep the ice cubes from diluting it), I began to think about flavor variations. Raspberries' sweet and tart flavor, a classic addition to lemonade, worked beautifully. A strawberry lime version gave a nod to margaritas. A cucumber-mint version tasted like a day at the spa. And if there's anything more summery than watermelon lemonade, I can't picture it.

KEY TOOL

Getting Every Last Drop

Our favorite manual citrus juicer is the Chef'n FreshForce Citrus Juicer, which extracts far more juice from a supermarket lemon than any other manual juicer we tried



LEMONADE

Serves 6 to 8

When purchasing lemons, choose large ones that give to gentle pressure; hard lemons have thicker skin and yield less juice. Lemons are commonly waxed to prevent moisture loss, increase shelf life and protect from bruising during shipping Scrub them with a vegetable brush under running water to remove wax, or buy organic lemons. Don't worry about the seeds in the extracted juice; the entire juice mixture is strained at the end of the recipe Serve poured over ice, if desired Note that we recommend chilling the lemonade for 1 hour prior to serving

- **1½ cups sugar**
- **2 lemons, sliced thin, seeds and ends discarded, plus 2 cups juice (12 lemons)**
- **7 cups cold water**

1. Using potato masher, mash sugar and half of lemon slices in large bowl until sugar is completely wet, about 1 minute
2. Add water and lemon juice and whisk until sugar is completely dissolved, about 1 minute Strain mixture through fine mesh strainer set over large bowl or pitcher, pressing on solids to extract as much juice as possible. Discard solids.
3. Add remaining lemon slices to strained lemonade and chill for at least 1 hour. Serve

Clockwise from top: Lemonade, Raspberry Lemonade, Cucumber-Mint Lemonade, Strawberry-Lime Lemonade, and Watermelon Lemonade.

Slow Cooker All-Purpose Tomato Sauce

Does a simple tomato sauce have to be a supervised stovetop affair? No.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

IT'S A ROMANTIC scene: a pot of tomatoes simmering on the stove, filling the kitchen with an aroma promising saucy suppers for weeks to come. But stovetop tomato sauce requires constant monitoring to stave off scorching. I wanted a convenient way to make tomato sauce without peeling the tomatoes first and without the messy task of removing the seeds at the end. I looked to the slow cooker.

In the closed chamber of the slow cooker, I thought, contents can simmer at a consistent low temperature for long periods of time unchaperoned—with no threat of scorching.

To get my bearings, I cut a bunch of plum tomatoes in half, placed them in the slow cooker, and let them stew. A few hours later, I had a fleet of seeds bobbing in a sea of watery sauce. As steam had condensed inside the slow cooker, it had beaded on the bottom of the lid and dripped back into the tomatoes rather than evaporating away. And while we don't mind the seeds in quicker stovetop sauces because the gel around the seeds is packed with flavor, they do contain a bitter compound that is slowly extracted during longer cooking times, eventually permeating the sauce with an unpleasant flavor that overwhelms any benefit gleaned from the gel.

So for an all-day slow-cooker sauce, the seeds had to go, and when the seeds go, so does the gel. I held a sliced tomato half in each hand and squeezed out the seeds and gel. While this step may appear wasteful, remember that in the traditional stovetop method, most of this extra liquid would be cooked off anyway. By squeezing the raw tomatoes up front, you do the dirty work first. Bonus: It's kind of fun.

I left the lid slightly ajar so some steam could escape. This helped concentrate the flavors. After they had spent a few hours in the slow cooker, I ladled the tomatoes into a colander and let the excess water drain away. I then moved them to the blender to whiz into a thick, ruby red sauce.

I decided to keep this all-purpose tomato sauce unadorned, allowing me to use it later for anything from marinara sauce to a bloody Mary mix (it freezes beautifully for up to two months). Did I sacrifice romance? Perhaps. But this simple sauce has its own charms.

Make a big batch: This sauce keeps for a week in the fridge or two months in the freezer.

SLOW-COOKER ALL-PURPOSE TOMATO SAUCE Makes 7 cups

Be sure to leave the lid slightly ajar—about ½ inch—to allow steam to escape and help concentrate the flavor. Use this versatile sauce as a base for marinara sauce or tomato soup or in place of crushed tomatoes in our Chicken Parmesan for Two (June/July 2016).

- 8 pounds plum tomatoes, cored and halved crosswise
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1. Working over bowl, squeeze each tomato half to remove seeds and excess juice. Discard seeds and juice. Transfer tomatoes to slow cooker; add salt and stir to combine. Leaving lid about ½ inch ajar, cook tomatoes until very soft, 8 to 10 hours on low or 5 to 7 hours on high.

2. Transfer tomatoes to colander and let excess liquid drain (do not press on tomatoes).

3A. FOR A BLENDER: Working in batches, process tomatoes in blender until smooth, about 1 minute. Transfer sauce to clean bowl.

3B. FOR AN IMMERSION BLENDER: Return tomatoes to slow cooker. Submerge blender in slow cooker and process tomatoes until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes.

4. Stir oil into sauce until incorporated. Let sauce cool completely, then refrigerate for up to 1 week or freeze for up to 2 months.

KEY STEP **A Big Squeeze**

Working over a bowl, squeeze each tomato half to remove the seedy jelly. Why? The seeds would turn the sauce bitter if cooked long enough, and the moisture in the jelly would need to be cooked off anyway.

The American Table
Arab Roots and Lemonade Lucy

Lemonade, a mixture of lemon juice, sugar, and water, has roots in many cultures. Arab cookbooks from the 13th century contained recipes for drinks made from lemon syrup. Mongols drank a sweetened lemon drink containing alcohol, and street vendors in France sold it in the 1800s. During the mid-19th century, American bartenders mixed lemonade into cocktails, but with the temperance movement, lemonade became a genteel Victorian-era drink supposedly popularized by First Lady Lucy Webb Hayes (wife of 19th U.S. president Rutherford B. Hayes). Forbidding the consumption of alcohol in the White House, she became known as Lemonade Lucy. Household juice extractors increased the drink's popularity, so it was often enjoyed with guests, served out of pitchers specifically designed for it.

CUCUMBER-MINT LEMONADE
Mash 1 peeled, thinly sliced cucumber and 1 cup fresh mint leaves along with sugar and half of lemon slices in step 1, increasing mashing time to 3 minutes. Add 1 peeled, thinly sliced cucumber and ½ cup fresh mint leaves to strained lemonade with remaining half of lemon slices in step 3.

RASPBERRY LEMONADE
Mash 2 cups raspberries along with sugar and half of lemon slices in step 1.

STRAWBERRY-LIME LEMONADE
Substitute 2 thinly sliced limes for thinly sliced lemons. Add half of lime slices and 1 cup sliced strawberries to large bowl and mash with sugar in step 1. Add remaining lime slices and 1 cup sliced strawberries to strained lemonade in step 3.

WATERMELON LEMONADE
Mash 4 cups coarsely chopped seedless watermelon with sugar and half of lemon slices in step 1, increasing mashing time to 3 minutes. Reduce water to 6 cups.

Equipment Review Dry Measuring Cups

Could we find a perfect set to sweep the competition? BY AMY GRAVES

SUCCESS IN BAKING starts with careful measuring. And while a good scale is the most accurate tool, dry measuring cups are often more practical for the home cook. Lots of new models have come on the market since we last tested measuring cups eight years ago, so we decided to revisit the category. We rounded up 12 sets, priced from $5.99 to $44.95 and including our prior winner (from Amco), and headed into the test kitchen to see which ones measured up.

Our preferred measuring method for dry ingredients is the "dip and sweep". We dip the cup into the container of flour or sugar, scoop out a heaping cupful, and then sweep the top of the measure level with the back of a knife. Models with handles that extend out on the same plane as the top of the cup best accommodate this, so we chose a combination of metal and plastic cups with this basic shape. We also limited our selection to sets that included at least the four essential sizes: 1 cup, ½ cup, ⅓ cup, and ¼ cup.

First we evaluated the cups for their most important quality: accuracy. We carefully filled each cup to its maximum capacity with both water and granulated sugar and weighed it on a calibrated lab-quality scale; then, knowing how much a cup of both water and sugar should weigh, we did the math to determine accuracy and scored the cups accordingly. Three sets were off by as much as 6 percent, sending them tumbling in the rankings. Our top performers were either spot-on or off by just a fraction of a percentage point.

> Visit **CooksCountry.com/aug16** to read the full results of our testing and to see the three lower-rated models not pictured here.

Next we turned to ease of use. We asked a range of test cooks and editors to dip and sweep a cup of flour with the 1-cup measure from each of the 12 sets. Even with our carefully vetted lineup of straight-handled cups, our testers found problems with several models—those with rims slightly higher than the handles created a jarring catch to the sweeping motion that was at best awkward and at worst jostled the cup and required us to start anew. We preferred cups that were perfectly even with the handles for seamless sweeping.

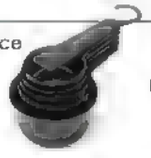
The measurement markings on some cup sets were large and well placed on the handles, where they were easily identifiable. Cups with tiny or hidden markings were irksome, as we had to double-check to see which cup we were using. The downfall for some plastic cups was the impermanence of their measurement markings; those that were printed in ink came off with very little scrubbing. Almost all the stainless-steel sets have markings that are etched on, no amount of scrubbing was going to take those off. One outlying stainless-steel set had markings in ink on plastic handles—markings that came right off.

An additional problem: When we filled cups with flour and placed them on the counter, some smaller ones with long handles tipped over and spilled, causing them to lose points.

To test their durability, we used the cups to repeatedly scoop up wet, heavy sand to simulate years of hard use. Most plastic cups flexed with the motion and went right back into place, although a few smaller cups bent permanently. Many of the stainless-steel handles bent when we used great force; others bent immediately, with very gentle scooping. The most durable sets, including the winner, have shorter handles that are part of the cup mold (rather than riveted on) and didn't bend or flex at all.

Our winning measuring cups, from OXO, are made of sturdy, durable stainless steel and are accurate and easy to use. They have handles perfectly flush with the cup rims for seamless dipping and sweeping and laser-etched markings that don't scrub off, plus, they have the handy bonus feature of magnetic tabs to keep the stacked cups tidy in a drawer or cabinet (their short handles also make them more compact and easy to store). These cups are an intelligent improvement on the classic design.

KEY: Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA	TESTERS' NOTES
OXO Good Grips Stainless Steel Measuring Cups **Model:** 11132000 **Price:** $19.99 **Number of Cups:** 4 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★★ **Ease of Use** ★★½	Accurate and extremely durable, this set snaps together for compact storage. The handles are seamless with the cups themselves, making them easy to level off.
NORPRO Grip-EZ Set of 6 Measuring Cups **Model:** 3018 **Price:** $6.87 **Number of Cups:** 6 **Material:** Plastic	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★★ **Ease of Use** ★★	This set had a high degree of accuracy in every size, and it was the most durable plastic set we tested. Long handles flush with the rims aided scooping and sweeping.
RECOMMENDED		
 **OXO** Good Grips 6-Piece Plastic Measuring Cups **Model:** 11110901 **Price:** $7.99 **Number of Cups:** 6 **Material:** Plastic	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★½ **Ease of Use** ★★	This accurate six-cup set's matte plastic finish gave the handles a good, tacky grip, but some testers found the handles too short. A few cups tipped over when empty.
NORPRO Grip-EZ Set of 5 Stainless Steel Measuring Cups **Model:** 3067 **Price:** $27.88 **Number of Cups:** 5 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★ **Ease of Use** ★★½	This accurate, shovel-shaped set felt cup-heavy and unbalanced to some, but plastic tabs on the handles made them easy to hold. The handles bent a bit when we scooped wet sand.
AMCO Houseworks Professional Performance 4-Piece Measuring Cup Set **Model:** 864 **Price:** $15.99 **Number of Cups:** 4 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★½ **Durability** ★★ **Ease of Use** ★★★	Our previous winner still solid, was surpassed by sets that were slightly more accurate and more durable. The handles bent quickly when we scooped wet sand (but they easily bent back).
RSVP Endurance Measuring Cup Set **Model:** DMC 10 **Price:** $36.95 **Number of Cups:** 7 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★ **Ease of Use** ★★	This set of seven cups was very accurate. But the handles bent immediately when the cups were dragged through wet sand, and the thin handles dug into some testers' hands.
RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS		
PREPWORKS by Progressive 6 Piece Measuring Cup Set **Model:** BA-3518 **Price:** $5.99 **Number of Cups:** 6 **Material:** Plastic	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★½ **Ease of Use** ★	Its handles were slippery and too short for most testers, but this set was reasonably durable and very accurate. The handle on the smallest cup bent when scooping sand.
MIU France Stainless Steel Set of 7 Measuring Cups **Model:** 91688 **Price:** $37.28 **Number of Cups:** 7 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★★ **Durability** ★★ **Ease of Use** ★	This accurate seven-cup set has long, uncomfortable, heavy handles that bent when scooping sand and made some cups tip over when empty.
LE CREUSET Stainless Steel Measuring Cups **Model:** SSA2530 **Price:** $44.95 **Number of Cups:** 4 **Material:** Stainless Steel	**Accuracy** ★★ **Durability** ★★ **Ease of Use** ★★	Wide and shallow, like miniature skillets, these heavy, slightly awkward cups seemed sturdy—until we used them to scoop wet sand, which bent the handle on the 1-cup measure.

DID YOU KNOW? All products reviewed by America's Test Kitchen, home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines, are independently chosen, researched, and reviewed by our editors. We buy products for testing at retail locations and do not accept unsolicited samples for testing. We do not accept or receive payment or consideration from product manufacturers or retailers. Manufacturers and retailers are not told in advance of publication which products we have recommended.

Taste Test Bagged Popcorn

Bagged popcorn is selling like crazy these days; does it deserve the hype? BY LAUREN SAVOIE

AMERICANS HAVE BEEN crazy about popcorn since the Great Depression, when it became popular as a cheap, filling, and nutritious snack. These days, popcorn comes in all shapes, sizes, and flavors—from kernels you pop on the stovetop to buttery microwavable products and even mail-order heirloom varieties. But we've had our eye on a different category that's exploded over the past few years: bagged popcorn.

While sales of microwave and kernel popcorn have slowly declined, bagged popcorn sales have increased 60 percent since 2012. We rounded up seven top-selling, nationally available varieties of bagged popcorn to see if we could find a favorite. Though most brands offer multiple flavors, we stuck with basic salt and oil varieties. Twenty-one America's Test Kitchen staffers sampled the popcorns side by side in a blind, randomized tasting.

Though all the products consisted of just oil, salt, and popcorn kernels, tasters noted clear differences between samples: Some were toasty, nutty, and slightly sweet, while others tasted bland, flat, or even a bit burnt. Examining ingredient labels, we saw no trend in type or amount of oil or type of popcorn (all labels just listed "popcorn").

But the salt was another story. The top products contained a moderate amount of sodium—about 110 milligrams per 1-ounce serving—compared to the 220 milligrams in middle-of-the-pack popcorns and as little as 75 milligrams in the lowest-ranked samples. Products with too little salt were deemed "muted," while those with too much lacked nuanced toasted-corn flavor. We preferred those with moderate levels of sodium, which allowed the subtleties of the popcorn to shine.

Tasters cared about texture and showed a clear preference for certain samples, so we went in search of answers. All popcorn pops the same way. As the kernels are heated, water inside them begins to steam, building up pressure and causing starch in the kernels to gelatinize. Once enough pressure builds up, the foamy starch bursts through the tough outer layer of the kernels and solidifies as it hits the air—that's the whitish, billowy part of popped kernels.

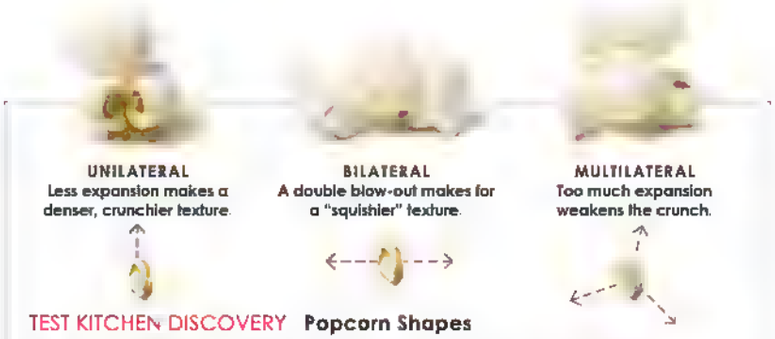
To learn more about the factors that affect how popcorn pops, we reached out to food scientists at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). They told us that a number of factors could impact pop: a kernel's size, moisture content, or breed; how the kernels are stored, and how they're heated. Unfortunately, manufacturers weren't willing to disclose specifics about their processes or kernels.

Looking for more clues, we scrutinized the popcorn pieces. Tasters preferred round, hearty pieces. UNL scientists told us that the popcorn industry categorizes popped kernels into three different shapes: unilateral (pieces that expand in one direction), bilateral (pieces that expand in two directions), or multilateral (pieces that expand in three or more directions). Unilateral popcorn pieces are the easiest to spot; they can resemble little octopuses, with dense, round bodies and appendages extending from the bodies on one side. Bilateral pieces are long, flat, and often symmetrical. Multilateral pieces are large and airy, with at least three appendages stemming from the bodies. Using a visual guide provided by David Jackson, a researcher at UNL, we counted out 100 pieces from each popcorn in our lineup and sorted them according to shape.

The result: Top-ranked popcorns contained more than 50 percent unilateral pieces, while the lowest-ranked sample had a paltry 4 percent. Tasters perceived products with a high percentage of unilateral pieces to be crunchier and more substantial, while they commented that those with fewer unilateral pieces were "spongy."

The results mirror one UNL study, which found that consumers preferred unilateral pieces in microwave popcorn, rating them as being crispier than other shapes. While researchers are still exploring consumer popcorn preferences, our tasters strongly preferred the dense, crunchy texture of unilateral pieces.

Our favorite was Cape Cod Sea Salt Popcorn. Tasters found this popcorn, which is made up of half unilateral pieces, crisp and substantial, with a balanced, fresh flavor. In fact, when we tasted it against homemade popcorn, tasters found the two surprisingly similar. You will pay for the convenience of bagged popcorn. Our winner costs $0.72 per ounce compared to $0.08 per ounce of kernels for home-popped. But it's a great no-cook shortcut that's surprisingly similar to homemade.


UNILATERAL
Less expansion makes a denser, crunchier texture.
BILATERAL
A double blow-out makes for a "squishier" texture.
MULTILATERAL
Too much expansion weakens the crunch.

TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY Popcorn Shapes

The popcorn industry categorizes popped kernels into three basic shapes: unilateral (pieces that expand in one direction), bilateral (pieces that expand in two directions), and multilateral (pieces that expand in three or more directions). The best popcorns have the highest percentage of unilateral pieces, which are perceived as crunchier and more substantial. In the photos above, picture the raw kernel in the center of each popped piece.

RECOMMENDED

		TASTERS' NOTES
CAPE COD Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.15 for 4.4 oz ($0.72 per oz) **Sodium:** 110 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 50%		This popcorn won tasters over with its "nutty," "toasty" corn flavor and "well-calibrated salt." Its "hearty," "puffy" kernels were "crisp" and "crunchy" up front, with a tender interior that "almost melted" in tasters' mouths as they ate. "This is pretty ideal popcorn," summarized one taster.
SMARTFOOD DELIGHT Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.99 for 5.5 oz ($0.73 per oz) **Sodium:** 115 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 63%		Tasters loved this familiar popcorn's "round," "bubbly," "cartoon-y fluffy" pieces, which were "plump" and "meaty," with "good crunch." It also had a nice subtle saltiness and a "toasty" flavor. "Reminds me of the movies," said one taster.
KETTLE Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.29 for 3 oz ($1.10 per oz) **Sodium:** 240 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 38%		Though many tasters liked this product's "toasty" notes and "crisp" exterior, some thought the popcorn tasted "slightly burnt." Still, most loved these "airy," "fluffy" kernels, which had a subtly "sweet corn flavor."
POPCORN INDIANA Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.79 for 4.75 oz ($0.80 per oz) **Sodium:** 220 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 18%		With a "natural sweetness" and "toasty," almost "buttery" notes, this product was deemed similar to "movie popcorn." Unfortunately, some tasters were disappointed with the "less substantial" shape and size of the kernels, which were "soft" and "lacked crunch."

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

479 Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.59 for 4 oz ($0.90 per oz) **Sodium:** 80 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 38%		While this popcorn had an "interesting mix of white and yellow pieces" and a "buttery" flavor, a few tasters deemed it too "bland" due to its lower salt content. Despite its high proportion of unilateral pieces, some tasters found the pieces "tough" and "chewy."
BOOMCHICKAPOP Sea Salt Popcorn **Price:** $3.09 for 4.8 oz ($0.64 per oz) **Sodium:** 90 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 34%		With less salt than most other products, this popcorn was "inoffensive" and "mild," if not "a little bland." Though some tasters did pick up on subtle "toasty," "corn-y" notes in these kernels, many were distracted by their "rubbery," "cardboard-y" texture.
SKINNYPOP Popcorn Original **Price:** $3.79 for 4.4 oz ($0.86 per oz) **Sodium:** 75 mg **Percentage Desirable Unilateral Pieces:** 4%		These smaller, angular pieces lacked structure and shape, compressing between tasters' teeth like "spongy," "stale" bits of "Styrofoam." Flavor was "muted" from lack of salt, though a few salt-conscious tasters appreciated the "purity" of this "mild" popcorn.

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more, that always come out for the holidays, and that have earned a place at your table and in your heart through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit **CooksCountry.com/recipesubmission** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447) and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

PEPPER VINEGAR

Kimberley Johnston of Little Rock, Ark., writes, "This vinegar gets better the longer it sits and is great on just about everything, especially pulled pork sandwiches. And don't forget the chiles! I like to chop or mince a few to add a vinegary kick to chili, burgers, and tacos."

Makes about 3 cups

Pepper vinegar is spicy. For a milder vinegar, remove the seeds and ribs from the chiles.

- **6 ounces tabasco, red Fresno, or red jalapeño chiles, halved lengthwise**
- **3 cups distilled white vinegar**
- **4 teaspoons sugar**
- **2 teaspoons salt**
- **1 teaspoon black peppercorns**
- **¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes**

Pack chiles in clean 1-quart glass jar with tight-fitting lid. Combine vinegar, sugar, salt, peppercorns, and pepper flakes in medium saucepan and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Pour brine into jar, making sure chiles are fully submerged. Let cool completely. Affix jar lid and refrigerate for at least 3 weeks before serving. Pepper vinegar will keep, refrigerated, for up to 3 months.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

We've got your holiday season covered in our October/November issue with a comprehensive cooking class on **Roast Turkey** side dishes like **Brussels Sprouts with Bacon**, appetizers like **Devils on Horseback**, and unexpected desserts including **Apple Pandowdy** and **Rum Pumpkin Pie**. We'll tell you which canned **pumpkin puree** to use and which **nonstick skillet** is the best on the market. We have ideas for easy suppers on those "in between" nights during that busy time of year, including **Meatloaf Burgers**, **Skillet Roast Chicken with Garlic Smashed Potatoes**, and **Pasta with Sausage Ragu**. Finally, we'll pay a visit to North Carolina where we'll uncover the secrets to that state's famous **Fish Stew**. Join us.

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RC = Recipe Card

FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning dry measuring cups, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by July 31, 2016, or write to Rooster AS16, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Constance Canomikes of Williamsburg, Va., found the rooster in the April/May 2016 issue on page 12 and won our favorite inexpensive digital thermometer.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for 4 months online at **CooksCountry.com**

Broccoli with Lemon-Oregano Dressing
Hawaiian Macaroni Salad
Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken and Corn Soup
Pickled Watermelon Rind
Quick Collard Greens
Shrimp and Grits
Tasting Fettuccine
Testing Disposable Plates
Testing Dry Measuring Cups
White Layer Cake Rounds

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Download the *Cook's Country* app for iPad and start a free trial subscription or purchase a single issue of the magazine. All issues are enhanced with full-color Cooking Mode slide shows that provide step-by-step instructions for completing recipes, plus expanded reviews and ratings. Go to **CooksCountry.com/iPad** to download our app through iTunes.

30 MINUTE SUPPER

QUICK RATATOUILLE

30 MINUTE SUPPER

SWEET-AND-SPICY BEEF CHILI

30 MINUTE SUPPER

TANDOORI-STYLE CHICKEN WITH GRILLED NAAN

30 MINUTE SUPPER

SWORDFISH KEBABS WITH ZUCCHINI RIBBON SALAD

SWEET-AND-SPICY BEEF CHILI Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Molasses-rich baked beans provide a sweet counterpoint to the smoky heat of chipotles in this quick-cooking chili.

- 1¼ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 (16-ounce) can Bush's Original Recipe Baked Beans
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 2 ears corn, kernels cut from cobs
- 4 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (1 cup)

1. Cook beef, onion, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until meat is no longer pink and onion is softened, about 8 minutes. Stir in chipotle, garlic, and cumin and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Stir in beans, tomatoes and their juice, and corn and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until slightly thickened, about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, sprinkled with cheddar.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve with diced avocado. We found that Bush's Original Recipe Baked Beans is the most consistent product for this recipe.

QUICK RATATOUILLE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Canned crushed tomatoes give this dish long-cooked flavor and texture. We finish the dish with a healthy swirl of olive oil—at least 2 tablespoons—for added richness.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 pound eggplant, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 12 ounces yellow summer squash, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 onion, chopped
- Salt and pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved

1. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add eggplant, squash, bell peppers, onion, 1½ teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 15 minutes. Push vegetables to sides of pan. Add garlic to center and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Stir in tomatoes and basil and cook, uncovered, until mixture has thickened and vegetables are completely tender, about 7 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to platter. Stir in olives and drizzle with extra oil before serving.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve with lemon wedges and crusty bread.

SWORDFISH KEBABS WITH ZUCCHINI RIBBON SALAD

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Italian seasoning, an earthy blend of up to six different herbs, is a powerhouse ingredient in our homemade Italian dressing.

- 7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice (2 lemons)
- 1 tablespoon dried Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pounds skinless swordfish steaks, 1 inch thick, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 3 zucchini (8 ounces each), shaved into ribbons with vegetable peeler, seeds discarded
- 3 ounces kale, shaved with vegetable peeler
- 3 ounces ricotta salata, shaved with vegetable peeler
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint

1. Whisk ¼ cup oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, Italian seasoning, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add swordfish and toss to coat. Thread swordfish evenly onto 4 metal skewers.

2. Whisk remaining 3 tablespoons oil, remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in second large bowl, set dressing aside.

3. Grill skewers over hot fire, turning often, until swordfish registers 140 degrees, 9 to 12 minutes. Transfer to platter. Add zucchini, kale, ricotta salata, and mint to bowl with dressing and toss to coat. Serve with swordfish.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: To prevent the salad from becoming watery, wait until just before serving to toss the ingredients.

TANDOORI-STYLE CHICKEN WITH GRILLED NAAN Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Scoring the chicken allows the spiced yogurt marinade to penetrate more deeply into the meat for maximum flavor.

- 1¾ cups plain whole-milk yogurt
- ¼ cup lime juice (2 limes)
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- Salt and pepper
- 3 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts cut in half, drumsticks, and/or thighs), trimmed
- 4 naan breads

1. Whisk 1 cup yogurt, 2 tablespoons lime juice, garlic, ginger, garam masala, and ½ teaspoon salt together in large bowl. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and, using sharp knife, cut through skin to make three ½-inch-deep slits across each piece. Season with salt and pepper, transfer to yogurt mixture, and toss to coat.

2. Mix remaining ¾ cup yogurt, remaining 2 tablespoons lime juice, and ½ teaspoon salt in small bowl until smooth; set sauce aside.

3. Grill chicken over medium fire until breasts register 160 degrees and drumsticks/thighs register 175 degrees, about 12 minutes per side. Transfer chicken to platter. Grill naan until warmed through, about 1 minute per side. Serve chicken with naan and sauce.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Our favorite garam masala is McCormick Gourmet Collection Garam Masala.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

CARIBBEAN PORK TENDERLOIN WITH AVOCADO-MANGO SALAD

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PROSCIUTTO-WRAPPED CHICKEN WITH ASPARAGUS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

MARGHERITA PIZZA WITH PESTO

30-MINUTE SUPPER

GRILLED CUMIN-RUBBED FLANK STEAK WITH MEXICAN STREET CORN

PROSCIUTTO-WRAPPED CHICKEN WITH ASPARAGUS

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Wrapping the chicken in salty, flavor-packed prosciutto seasons the poultry and protects the surface from drying out.

- **4 (6-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and pounded to ½-inch thickness**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **8 thin slices prosciutto (4 ounces)**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **4 ounces fontina cheese, cut into 4 slices**
- **2 pounds asparagus, trimmed**
- **2 shallots, halved and sliced thin**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with pepper. Wrap each breast with 2 slices prosciutto.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken until prosciutto is lightly browned, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to prepared sheet and top each breast with 1 slice fontina. Bake until chicken registers 160 degrees, about 12 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add asparagus and cook until just tender and spotty brown, about 4 minutes. Add shallots, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper and cook until shallots are lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Pound only the thick end of each chicken breast to match the thickness of the thinner end.

CARIBBEAN PORK TENDERLOIN WITH AVOCADO-MANGO SALAD

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Coating the pork tenderloins in jerk seasoning and brown sugar gives them a spicy-sweet kick.

- **2 (12-ounce) pork tenderloins, trimmed**
- **2 tablespoons jerk seasoning**
- **2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **½ cup packed brown sugar**
- **2 avocados, halved, pitted, and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- **1 mango, peeled, pitted, and cut into ¼-inch pieces**
- **½ cup fresh cilantro leaves**
- **½ teaspoon grated lime zest plus 3 tablespoons juice (2 limes)**
- **1 tablespoon minced shallot**
- **Salt and pepper**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle all over with jerk seasoning. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch ovensafe nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook pork until browned on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes.

2. Off heat, spoon ¼ cup sugar over each tenderloin, pressing to adhere. Transfer skillet to oven and roast until pork registers 140 degrees, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer pork to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, combine avocados, mango, cilantro, lime zest and juice, shallot, ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 1 tablespoon oil in bowl. Slice pork, drizzle with pan juices, and serve with avocado-mango salad.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Cut avocados just before serving to avoid discoloration.

GRILLED CUMIN-RUBBED FLANK STEAK WITH MEXICAN STREET CORN

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Mayonnaise does double duty here, first as a flavorful fat for grilling the corn and then as the base of our sauce.

- **1 tablespoon ground cumin**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **¾ teaspoon chili powder**
- **¼ cup mayonnaise**
- **¼ cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro**
- **1 tablespoon lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving**
- **1 garlic clove, minced**
- **1 (1½- to 2-pound) flank steak, 1 inch thick, trimmed**
- **4 ears corn, husks and silk removed**

1. Combine cumin, 1 tablespoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ½ teaspoon chili powder in bowl. Combine mayonnaise, Pecorino, cilantro, lime juice, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and remaining ¼ teaspoon chili powder in separate bowl.

2. Pat steak dry with paper towels and sprinkle with spice mixture. Grill over hot fire until steak registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 4 to 6 minutes per side. Transfer to carving board and tent with foil.

3. Brush corn with half of mayonnaise mixture. Grill corn, turning often, until well browned on all sides, about 12 minutes. Transfer to platter and brush with remaining mayonnaise mixture. Cut corn in half and slice steak on bias against grain. Serve with lime wedges.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Morton & Bassett Chili Powder is the test kitchen's favorite chili powder.

MARGHERITA PIZZA WITH PESTO

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Using prepared pesto is a convenient timesaver. Buitoni Pesto with Basil is the test kitchen's favorite.

- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 pound pizza dough, room temperature**
- **1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained**
- **8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced ¼ inch thick and patted dry with paper towels**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **¼ teaspoon pepper**
- **¼ cup pesto**

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Grease rimmed baking sheet with 1 tablespoon oil. Press and roll dough into 15 by 11-inch rectangle on lightly floured counter. Transfer dough to prepared sheet and press to edges of sheet. Brush edges of dough with 1 tablespoon oil. Bake dough until top appears dry and bottom is just beginning to brown, about 5 minutes.

2. Remove crust from oven and pop any large bubbles with tip of paring knife. Scatter tomatoes over dough, leaving ½-inch border around edge. Arrange mozzarella over tomatoes and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake until crust is light golden around edges and mozzarella is melted, about 10 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking.

3. Transfer pizza to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Mix pesto and remaining 2 tablespoons oil until smooth and drizzle over pizza. Slice and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Be sure to use fresh mozzarella packed in water, not low-moisture mozzarella, in this recipe.

THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE

Blueberry Jam Cake

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- ½ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons low- or no-sugar-needed fruit pectin
- Pinch salt
- 15 ounces (3 cups) fresh or thawed frozen blueberries
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ cups (6 ounces) confectioners' sugar
- 8 ounces cream cheese, cut into 8 pieces and softened
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3 (8-inch) White Layer Cake Rounds*

FOR THE JAM FILLING: Process granulated sugar, pectin, and salt in food processor until combined, about 3 seconds. Add blueberries and pulse until chopped coarse, 6 to 8 pulses. Transfer blueberry mixture to medium saucepan and bring to simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until mixture is bubbling and just starting to thicken, 6 to 8 minutes. Off heat, stir in lemon juice. Transfer 1⅓ cups jam to small bowl, cover, and refrigerate until firm, about 3 hours. Strain remaining jam through fine-mesh strainer, cover, and set aside at room temperature. (You should have at least ¼ cup.)

FOR THE FROSTING: Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter and confectioners' sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add cream cheese, 1 piece at a time, and beat until no lumps remain. Add vanilla and 2 tablespoons strained jam and mix until incorporated. Transfer ⅓ cup frosting to each of 2 small bowls. Add 1 teaspoon strained jam to first bowl and 1 tablespoon strained jam to second bowl, stirring well to combine. (You should have 3 shades of frosting.)

TO ASSEMBLE: Place 1 cake round on cake turntable. Spread ⅔ cup chilled jam in even layer over top. Place second cake round on top of jam and repeat with remaining chilled jam. Place third cake round on top. Spread small amount of lightest-colored frosting in even layer over top and sides of cake. Using small offset spatula, spread darkest-colored frosting over bottom third of sides of cake; medium-colored frosting over middle third; and remaining lightest-colored frosting over top third. While spinning cake turntable, run spatula from bottom to top of side of cake to blend frosting colors. While spinning cake turntable, run spatula over top of cake, working from outside in to create spiral. Serve.

*For our recipe for White Layer Cake Rounds, go to **CooksCountry.com/whitecakerounds**, or use your own recipe.

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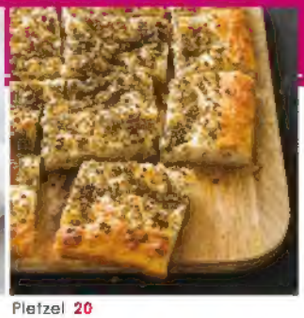
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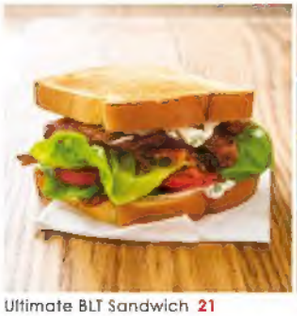
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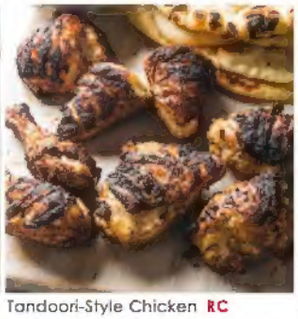
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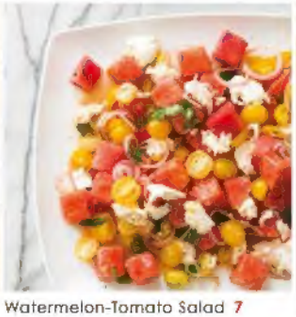
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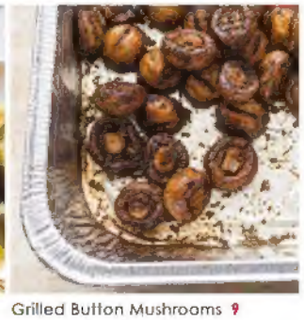
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